

Brand Associations of Minor Hockey Tournaments: Understanding the Rep Hockey
Parents' Perspective

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the parents, coaches, managers, and other volunteers who are the backbone of youth sport opportunities—especially minor hockey— in Canada. While the gratitude of participants is not shared as often as it should be, please know that your efforts are much appreciated. Your efforts have done much more than provide sporting opportunities; they have provided countless number of youth – myself included – with the skills and lessons needed to become quality human beings.

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Abstract

Tournaments and other hockey-related activities have been calculated to be a significant driver of tourist dollars for many regions across Canada. The competition to attract teams to participate in tournaments, which benefit the tournament organizers and the communities in which they reside, is significant. Consequently, the purpose of the study was to assess the brand associations that representative (rep) minor hockey parents from Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe Region perceive as relevant when considering ideal tournaments for their child to participate in. Brand associations have been classified as the attributes, benefits, or attitudes one uses to develop a perception of a product or service. To investigate the current study, 30 interviews were conducted using a laddering interview technique. Findings indicate that there are seven attributes and nine benefits that impact a tournament's brand association including: competition, tournament operations, accommodations, bonding, fun, parity, and time management. The interrelationship between the identified attributes and benefits is discussed while recommendations and directions for future research are presented.

Keywords: Brand Association, Co-Branding, Tournament, Rep Hockey, Laddering Interviews

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Nomenclature and Abbreviations

ALLIANCE – Minor Hockey Alliance of Ontario

CBBE - Consumer-Based Brand Equity

CCHL – Central Canada Hockey League

CSTA – Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance

EOJHL - Eastern Ontario Junior Hockey League

HEO – Hockey Eastern Ontario

HNO – Hockey Northwestern Ontario

GTHL – Greater Toronto Hockey League

NCJHL – National Capital Junior Hockey League

NOHA – Northern Ontario Hockey Association

ODMHA – Ottawa District Minor Hockey Association

OHA – Ontario Hockey Association

OHF – Ontario Hockey Federation

OHL – Ontario Hockey League

OMHA- Ontario Minor Hockey Association

OWHA – Ontario Women’s Hockey Association

SHEO – Sledge Hockey of Eastern Ontario

SSE – Senators Sports & Entertainment

TAM – Team Association Model

TRA – Theory of Reasoned Action

TPB – Theory of Planned Behaviour

WOM – Word of Mouth

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background Information

One could argue that one of the most identifiable characteristics of Canadian culture is hockey. As Ken Dryden described, hockey is one of the most descriptive pictures that can be used to describe Canadian life:

In Canada, hockey is one of winter's expectations. Hockey is part sport and recreation, part entertainment, part business, part community builder, social connector and fantasy maker. Young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural, French and English, east and west, able and disabled. It is this breadth, it's reach into the past, that makes hockey such a vivid instrument through which to view Canadian life (Dryden & MacGregor, 1989, p.9).

As much as hockey holds a significant place in the identity of Canadian culture with its romantic ideals, it cannot be forgotten that, for many, the sport is also a business. This sentiment is emphasized by the Canadian hockey industry being valued at over \$11 billion annually with \$2.6 billion being passed between communities as a result of hockey related expenditures (O'Reilly et al., 2015). The tournament sector of the Canadian hockey industry was of particular interest to this investigation.

Tournaments are a significant facet of the hockey industry generally, and the minor hockey sector specifically. This is signified by the number and variations of offerings which take place on a weekly basis in all seasons. Within Ontario alone, the Ontario Minor Hockey Association (OMHA) and the Greater Toronto Hockey League (GTHL) sanctioned over 600 tournaments for the 2013-2014 season (Greater Toronto Hockey League, 2013; Ontario Minor Hockey Association, 2013b). In addition to the vast

amount of tournament offerings that teams can choose from, it should be noted that minor hockey's governing bodies—like the OMHA—strictly limit the number of tournaments that member teams can participate in during the course of a season. Directly associated with the amount of tournament offerings are large tournament revenues for host organizations and tourist dollars for the host community (O'Reilly et al., 2014). As a result of the vast amount of tournament offerings that exist for teams to choose from, the limited opportunities that teams have to participate in tournaments, and the economic benefits associated with these events significant competition exists between organizers trying to attract teams to their respective events.

The process in which a team selects the tournaments it will participate in over the course of a season varies according to each team's personnel. As was expressed to the author by participants of this study, some teams have an authoritative head coach and/or manager who select the tournaments the team will participate in without any input from the collective parent group. More commonly, teams use a democratic process, at the beginning of the season, when selecting tournaments to participate in. Specifically, a coaching staff will present the team's parent group with a variety of tournaments that they are interested in participating in and the parents will vote on the offerings that they would personally like to attend. The tournaments that garner the most number of votes from the parent group will be the tournaments that the team attends that season. As can be seen, there is a sharp contrast between the two common ways tournaments are selected by teams; however, it is important to note that both popular options of selecting tournaments do not include the players on the team. Within youth sport, a form of proxy decision-making takes place since the children are the users of the sport service and it is their

parents who are the purchasers of the service (Green & Chalip, 1998). Indeed, the parents are ones paying the bills for their children's sport experiences. It is this characterization of being the purchaser of youth sporting experiences that makes parents' perceptions of such experiences—like tournaments—vital for organizers to understand.

Based on the tournament selection process, organizers who are able to make their tournament more appealing to coaches and parents will be able to stand out amongst the clutter in the industry. Like with any product or service, standing out amongst the clutter of the marketplace is directly associated with the brand of the item or service and how it is perceived by its targeted consumers (Berry, 2000). Indeed, minor hockey tournaments are services; therefore, each has its own unique brand that is perceived by parents and coaches—key stakeholders of the event. Thus, with each minor hockey tournament having its own brand, the competition within the tournament marketplace to attract teams, and the potential economic benefits associated with these events the purpose of this study was to investigate the key characteristics of an ideal tournament experience from the perspective of hockey parents.

Canadian Hockey Industry

With this study entrenched in the Canadian minor hockey industry it would be remiss to not discuss the details and features of minor hockey in Canada which have shaped the scope of this investigation. Indeed, hockey continues to be a prominent feature of the Canadian lifestyle; the sport's impact regularly ranges from a simple source of entertainment to a broader unifying force. Despite the valuation and economic impact of the hockey industry, recent literature has been critical of the business operations of hockey for overshadowing the often nostalgic view of the game that has entrenched it in

the Canadian identity (Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Ralph, 2013). Further, critics of the Canadian minor hockey system claim that the focus on money and elite competition has left it impossible to love and experience hockey in its often romanticized form (Arnold, 2002; Blake, 2010; Campbell & Parcels, 2013). Regardless of the criticism, hockey remains Canada's most played winter sport with over 634,000 people enrolled in the sport during the 2012-2013 season (Hockey Canada, 2014).

Currently, 9.5% of Canadian youth play hockey and female youth hockey has the fastest growing participation rate of any sport in the country (Campbell & Parcels, 2013, p.15). According to a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (2013) study, the average Canadian family that plays hockey spends approximately \$1,500 annually on hockey related expenditures. For elite level youth hockey programs, the average Canadian family with one child playing spends between \$8,000 and \$15,000 annually (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2013). Indeed, Campbell and Parcels (2013) note that some family expenditures reach over \$20,000 annually. Here, the cost associated with hockey participation is the most prominent factor hindering participation (Ralph, 2013).

While the costs associated with playing minor hockey may have hindered the participation rates in Canada's national winter sport, this cost issue likely contributes to the industry's stakeholders being described as relatively affluent (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). The costs and trends associated with minor hockey indicate that the majority of those within the industry are affluent and willing to spend to achieve the best experience possible (Blake, 2010; Campbell & Parcels, 2013). Many Canadians have voiced their concerns that hockey no longer is representative of all citizens; instead the sport has transitioned to represent only "white collar" upper-class Canadians who can afford to

play (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). However, despite the concern surrounding hockey participation, the sport still maintains its position of being a community builder as was described by MacGregor and Dryden (1989) a generation ago. Due to the affluent nature of stakeholders in minor hockey, significant opportunities exist for communities to capitalize on this market by producing quality hockey experiences, such as tournaments offered through local clubs. To understand where clubs “fit” in the Canadian hockey system, the structure and governance of the sport will be discussed next.

Structure & governance. The minor hockey system within Canada is governed by Hockey Canada which is made up of 13 provincial and regional branches (Hockey Canada, 2014). Each provincial and regional branch consists of member associations who implement programs, rules, and policies in accordance with Hockey Canada regulations within their jurisdiction (Ontario Hockey Federation [OHF], 2013). It is the uniform implementation of Hockey Canada’s policies across the country that has caused the offering of hockey services and expectations of those who use them to be consistent nationwide. Within Ontario, the number of hockey participants equates to over a third of all hockey participants in Canada and requires three regional branches of Hockey Canada to oversee and govern play in the province (see Figure 1). Combining all three organizations results in over 266,000 registered players, numerous organizations, over 38,000 coaches, countless volunteers, and minor hockey events located throughout Ontario (Hockey Canada, 2014). Indeed, the dense population of Ontario—more specifically, Southern Ontario—has resulted it in the region having the greatest number of hockey players and tournament offerings of any region in Canada (Hockey Canada, 2014; Greater Toronto Hockey League, 2013; Ontario Minor Hockey Association, 2013b).

Thus, due to the vast number of tournament offerings in Southern Ontario it is the focus of this study.

The largest regional branch of Hockey Canada is the Ontario Hockey Federation (OHF) (see Figure 1) which consists of seven member partners including: the Minor Hockey Alliance of Ontario (ALLIANCE), GTHL, Northern Ontario Hockey Association (NOHA), Ontario Hockey Association (OHA), Ontario Hockey League (OHL), OMHA, and Ontario Women's Hockey Association (OWHA). Each of the ALLIANCE, GTHL, NOHA, OMHA, and OWHA consist of local minor hockey associations who deliver minor hockey opportunities to constituents in compliance with Hockey Canada and its regional member partners' standards (OHF, 2013). The OHL and OHA do not govern minor hockey associations; instead, they are responsible for elite junior hockey within Ontario which consists of franchises rather than local associations (OHF, 2013).

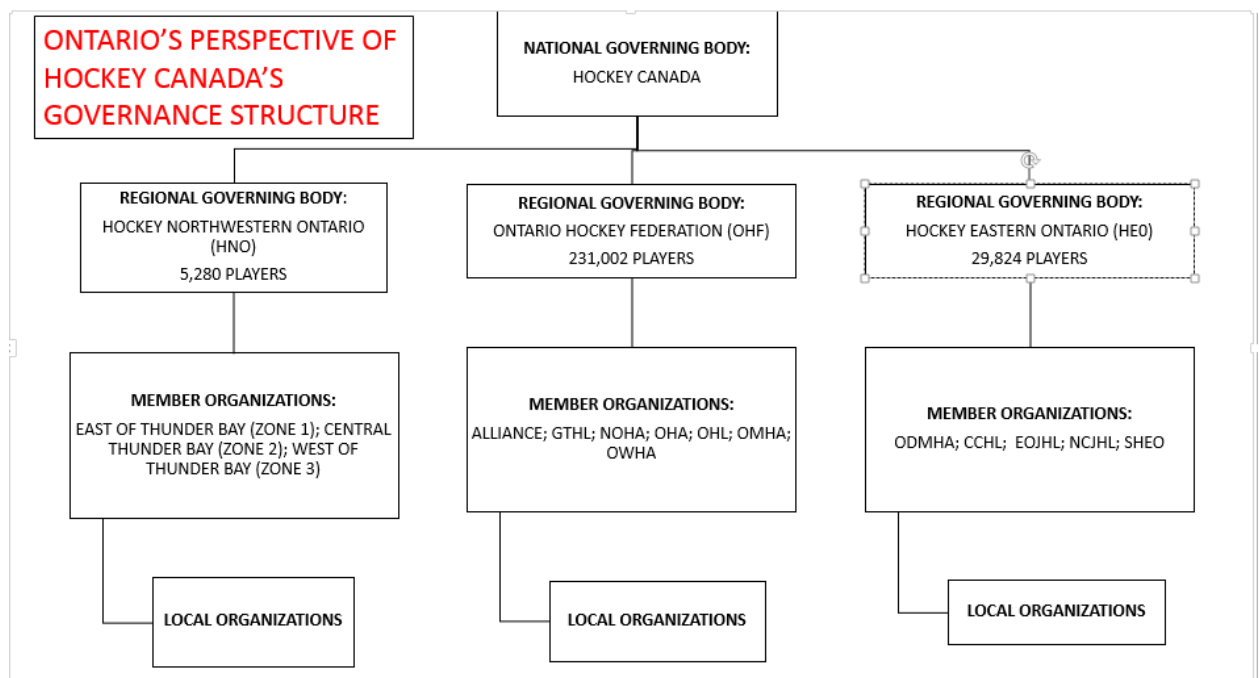


Figure 1: Ontario's Perspective of Hockey Canada's Governance Structure

In terms of competition, minor hockey participants compete on the basis of division or age group and initiation category (see Table 1). Initiation category refers to the expected skill level of a team and within representative (rep) hockey the population of the constituencies in which minor hockey organizations are housed is factored into determining competition. In order to ensure fair league play, communities with similar population sizes compete against each other. The highest and most elite form of minor hockey is AAA; this level of play is regularly limited to the associations who serve the largest populations. The lowest level of minor hockey is house league (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). It is possible for one organization to offer house league, AAA, and any other levels of rep hockey that it qualifies for to its participants.

Table 1: OMHA Age Reference Chart

DIVISION*	AGE OF PLAYERS	DIVISION*	AGE OF PLAYERS
Initiation or Pre-Novice	6 and Under	Minor Bantam	13 and Under
Tyke	7 and Under	Bantam	14 and Under
Novice	8 and Under	Minor Midget	15 and Under
Minor Atom	9 and Under	Minor Midget (for organizations classified at an initiation of BB and below)	16 and Under
Atom	10 and Under	Midget	17 and Under
Minor Peewee	11 and Under	Juvenile	19 and Under
Peewee	12 and Under	Overage Juvenile	20 (max 6 players) and Under

*It must be noted that this table is derived from the divisions offered by the OMHA in 2013. Division offerings are mainly consistent across all minor hockey organizations, however, some offerings vary depending on the region and amount of registered players (OMHA, 2013a).

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, a significant aspect of rep minor hockey competition is the opportunity for teams to participate in tournaments. On the ice,

tournament participation provides an opportunity for teams to play teams that they do not regularly face, enhance skill development and showcase talent. Off the ice, tournaments offer parents and children the opportunity to bond by travelling together, staying together (i.e., hotels and billets), and in some cases experience new cultures. Overall, tournaments are used by teams as focal points of fun that positively enhance the experience of both the parents and children participating in rep hockey. The aforementioned important characteristics of the tournament experience will be discussed in greater detail in the coming chapters. The following section will further discuss the concept of a tournament and its place within the minor hockey industry.

Tournaments

The concept of a tournament has been defined as a competitive single elimination, divisional, or round-robin structured event where participants compete against a prescribed set of opponents, with winners or competitors with the best records moving onto subsequent rounds of competition (Gupta, 2015; Larson & Johansson, 2014). Within minor hockey, tournaments are structured to promote competition amongst similar teams (i.e., age group and initiation category) often using a round-robin or divisional style of competition. Further, minor hockey tournaments are often designed to reward success in the sense that the more games a team wins in an event, the more games they will play on the path to crowning a champion.

As was mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, tournaments are a significant facet of the minor hockey industry; for example, hundreds are offered on a weekly basis throughout Ontario. It should be noted that the tournament industry does not experience a sizeable decline in offerings during the sport's off-season months (between

April and August). Here, spring and summer hockey respectively have spawned the creation of many elite level development programs in-order to provide players the opportunity to continue to hone their skills throughout the year (Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Gillmor, 2013). Similar to club team play during the regular hockey season, travel and tournaments are also associated with spring and summer hockey programs. As a result of the demand for off season hockey opportunities, spring and summer tournament participation can be priced at a premium (Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Gillmor, 2013). Furthermore, private organizations like CAN-AM and Pro Hockey Development, who specialize in hockey tournament production, now exist to capitalize on this desire for quality minor hockey events throughout the year.

The demand and vast amount of tournament offerings has resulted in large tournament revenues being generated for the host organizations and tourism dollars for the host community (O'Reilly et al., 2014). For example, entry fees for tournaments in Ontario range from approximately \$200 to over \$1,400 per team depending on the tournament, hosting centre, and initiation category of the players (GTHL, 2013; OMHA, 2013b). To illustrate the amount of potential revenue available for tournament organizing committees, consider the Brendan Shanahan Warrior International AAA Tournament; this is an annual elite level tournament sanctioned by the GTHL. This particular tournament charges an entry fee of \$1,495 per team and will host over 140 teams across four age divisions. Solely from registration, the host organization and committee stands to earn over \$209,000 in revenue. Clearly, this illustration does not attempt to calculate profitability as costs are not accounted for; moreover, the example is useful in demonstrating the kind of top line revenue that can be achieved by a typical tournament.

Beyond the importance that tournaments have to minor hockey stakeholders lay the opportunity to harness the power of these events to build and improve communities. Mason and Duquette (2008) analyzed the relationship between hockey and tourism in Canadian communities and determined that due to hockey's significance in Canadian culture, communities should use local hockey events to aid their local tourism sector. While Mason and Duquette's (2008) work used elite level junior hockey games as the hockey related tourist attraction, minor hockey tournaments should be similarly considered. Here, minor hockey tournaments provide communities new visitors whose expenditures contribute to the local economy. Mason and Duquette's (2008) suggestions are further supported by the fact that Canadian communities with a population of 100,000 or less have been calculated to receive approximately \$1 billion of the \$2.6 billion spent on hockey related tourism (O'Reilly et al., 2015). While the current study is not an economic impact analysis, it would be remiss to ignore the economic implications minor hockey tournaments have on their host communities. Due to economic shortcomings at the municipal level of government, many municipalities have targeted tourism, specifically sport tourism, to promote the communities' image and stimulate economic development (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). Indeed, few communities will ever be selected or have the capabilities to host elite sporting championships (i.e., Olympic, Pan-Am, or Commonwealth Games); hosting small events like minor hockey tournaments however, is certainly achievable and can have a significant impact on local economies.

The economic implications go well beyond the direct stakeholders of the tournament which include organizers, volunteers, participants, and parents. Hosting sporting events, such as minor hockey tournaments, acts as an opportunity to cross

leverage their benefits with indirect stakeholders in the community (i.e., restaurant owners, hotel operators, entertainment/tourist attraction providers) (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005). The long term success and overall impact of these events, however, is directly related to the quality of the tournament experience for the direct stakeholders. As Harrison-Hill and Chalip (2005) discussed, determining the quality of a sporting event spans beyond the athletic grounds where the games are played. Direct stakeholders in a sporting event often use the level of quality and service that they receive away from the host venues as determinants of quality for the actual sporting event and whether to revisit the host location (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Based on the potential implications that a minor hockey tournament can have on a community, the proper support channels and investment should be made to ensure the highest quality experience is produced. Indeed, tournaments that have been able to associate their brands with a high quality experience have evolved into high demand events for minor hockey teams and as economic catalysts to their host communities. For example, the Bell Capital Cup hosted annually in Ottawa, Ontario, has grown into the world's largest minor hockey tournament. In 2012, the tournament attracted 268 out-of-town teams to the Ottawa-Gatineau region generating over \$6 million of direct and indirect benefits (O'Reilly et al., 2014).

The annual success of the Bell Capital Cup signifies that organizers have established the tournament as a high quality event, thus, its brand reflects this perception of quality. The success of the Bell Capital Cup adds support to the claim that due to the affluent nature of hockey parents they will be willing to spend to ensure that they are provided with a quality hockey experience. Therefore, tournament organizers must be

aware of how their brand is perceived by direct stakeholders and position the brand to be associated with characteristics of a preferred tournament experience. The following section will discuss brand management and its importance to minor hockey tournament organizers.

Brand Management

The term “brand is now used to describe virtually anything carrying distinct identity, and the reputation, good or bad, associated with that identity” (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, p.7). A brand’s impact expands beyond acting as a product or service identifier to having a significant role in the purchase decision process (Berry, 2000). Regardless of the product or service of interest to a manager, one must look to the brand of the particular item of focus in order to understand its consumers. Specifically, a manager should look to what consumers associate with their respective brands in order to identify what is driving purchase decisions (Keller, 1993).

It can be argued that brand association has the greatest impact on the profitability and equitability of a brand. Keller (1993) proposes that brand associations are the dominant perception formed by individuals through considering the attributes, benefits (synonymously used to describe the consequences of purchasing a product or service), and attitudes (synonymously used to describe any personal values or high order beliefs a consumer may associate with a product or service) associated with a particular product or service that is under consideration. For any brand these three elements of association are interrelated and come together to form the overall perception of the brand that guides purchase decisions. Establishing a prominent brand is dependent upon the strength of the

relationship between the three types of brand association. The interdependence of the three classifications of brand association is further explained by Davis (2002):

Features and attributes of a product or service are undifferentiated unless they translate into a higher order of perceived benefits to the customer. Similarly, benefits are relatively weak unless they link to the customer's central values and beliefs (p. 54).

It is the interrelation between the attributes and benefits that formulated the framework of this work.

Similar to the evolution of brand management as a core focus for modern day marketers (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Knapp, 2000), sport tourism, due to its rapid growth, has evolved into a central focus for sport managers (Gibson & Fairley, 2013). Sport tourism takes place when individuals or groups travel to either participate in and/or witness a sport event or historic site. In order to capitalize on the sport tourism industry's growth, managers must not ignore the need for high quality brand management. Thus, this particular research project is focused on the brand associations of minor hockey tournaments which are a significant driver of tourist dollars in many regions across Canada (Mason & Duquette, 2008; O'Reilly et al., 2014; O'Reilly et al., 2015). Specifically, this study focused on minor hockey tournament brand associations from the perspective of hockey parents.

Once again, parents are the primary source of the economic support associated with these events. Indeed, within youth sport, parents are deemed to be the consumer even though their children are the users of the sporting service (Green & Chalip, 1998). Here, parents become a proxy decision-maker for their child's involvement in youth sport

(Chard, Edwards, & Potwarka, 2015; Green & Chalip, 1998;) and this extends to their influence on tournament selection decisions for their child's team. Therefore, understanding parents' preferences is crucial to the marketing, and overall success, of any tournament.

As has been mentioned, a brand plays a key role in the purchase decision making process for any type of consumer; hockey parents selecting a tournament destination, or providing input on tournament selection to team coaches and/or managers, for their child's team are no different. Ultimately, the findings of this research will be used to form recommendations to improve the branding strategies for tournament organizers. Tournaments who are able to associate their brand with the preferences of minor hockey parents will be able distinguish themselves from the clutter of the industry and be more likely to achieve the economic goals associated with the event.

Purpose of the Study

Minor hockey tournaments are a significant facet of the Canadian hockey industry for multiple reasons. Economically, communities can use grassroots sporting events, like tournaments, to stimulate their economies. Not every community will have an opportunity to host an elite level sporting event; however, hosting grassroots sporting events that can bring large numbers of tourist dollars into the community is achievable for all communities. Socially, rep sport participation (which includes tournament participation) is often considered a vehicle that promote bonding between families and teammates while establishing joyful memories that extend well beyond on ice competition (Chard et al., 2015). The social aspects of a tournament are reflective of some of the most prominent reasons people travel (Crompton 1979; Dann, 1977). Due to

the aforementioned time commitment rep hockey requires of families, some tournament experiences are considered family vacations. Altogether, the economic and social benefits associated with minor hockey tournaments has caused the industry to be held in high regard within the Canadian hockey industry.

Indeed, there is significant competition to attract teams to the ample number of tournaments offered in Ontario on a yearly basis. The economic and social significance of these events coupled with the strictly enforced tournament entry limits teams face only enhances the competition. As a result of the competition within the industry, the brand of each tournament offering and how it is perceived by rep hockey parents significantly influences whether the tournament will be successful or not. More specifically, it is the brand associations established by rep minor hockey parents that significantly influences whether a tournament will be able to stand out amongst the clutter in the industry and be successful. Keller (1993) indicates that brand association is a significant driver in the brand image developed by consumers, which ultimately plays an important role in the purchasing decision and overall generation of brand equity. Through the Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, Keller (1993) proposes that brand associations can be classified as attributes, benefits, or attitudes. Once again, it is the interrelation amongst the three types of brand associations discussed by Keller (1993) that formed the framework for this project.

As was mentioned previously, parents act as a proxy decision-maker with regards to their children's sporting experiences; therefore, it is the parents' preferences and established brand associations that are critical for managers of youth sport to understand. It is important to note that for this particular research however, where proxy decision-

making was the central focus, parents' personal values when evaluating tournament options for their child's team to participate in are less central to this investigation. Indeed, values indicate why we *personally* want something; however, the nature of a proxy decision involves making a decision for a third-party (Chard et al., 2015). Consumer preferences—like those of tournament attending hockey parents—can be identified by getting the consumer articulate *why* and *how* a product or service's attributes are important (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). As discussed in chapter three, the researcher chose the laddering interview technique as the best research method to implement in order to fulfill the purpose of this study.

Tournaments like the Bell Capital Cup, Quebec International PeeWee Hockey Tournament, and The Brick Invitational Hockey Tournament have established brands that are reflective of tournament attributes and benefits of attending that resonate well with rep hockey parents; thus, allowing them to become world renowned hockey events. While it is unlikely each tournament offering will be able to reach the worldwide recognition of the three aforementioned tournaments, organizers should be consistently trying improve upon the current offering of their respective event(s) in order to ensure that their tournament(s) regularly achieves the economic and social goals associated with tournaments. Improvement begins by understanding how the current offering of the tournament is perceived by rep hockey parents—a key stakeholder. Therefore, due to the significant impact that brand associations have on the purchase decision-making process, the findings of this research are used to form recommendations to improve the branding strategies implemented by tournament organizers. In order to form tournament branding recommendations the following research questions are presented:

- I. When thinking of a preferred tournament to attend, what are important attributes of the tournament that influence hockey parents to consider it more favourably than other tournament offerings?
- II. When thinking of a preferred tournament to attend, what are important personal benefits of attending the tournament that influence hockey parents to consider a particular tournament more favourably than other tournament offerings?
- III. How do the attributes and benefits relate to one another?

Sensitising Concepts

In addition to providing practical recommendations for tournament organizers to apply to their current branding and event planning strategies, this research aimed to contribute to advancing the application of brand associations in two disciplines of sport management academics: sport consumer behaviour and sport tourism.

As will be highlighted in the following review of literature, the existent knowledge and application of brand association in the sport industry is limited to research that has been completed on the fan bases of professional and collegiate sport teams. Specifically, various models to measure brand association have been created to aid sport managers which include the Team Association Model (TAM) (Gladden & Funk, 2002) and the Team Brand Association Scale (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). While these models are thorough and helpful, their transferability is limited to other domains of the sport industry that do not have the fandom that elite level team sports do. Furthermore, research that has focused on brand association and generating models to measure it have been derived from researcher generated constructs rather than the thoughts of consumers

(Ross et al., 2006). Part of the focus of this research is to expand the understanding of brand associations using constructs identified by consumers of grassroots sport, specifically to minor hockey tournaments.

As the opening chapter of this thesis has described, proxy decision-making is prevalent in youth sport and the factors that influence these decisions are central to the success tournaments and other youth sport services. Mitchell (2012) notes that there is more interest in the role that family members play in decision-making processes. Specifically, a gap exists in sport management literature regarding influences that impact proxy decision-making for sport consumption. In terms of this research, the author used the link between expectancy-values theories of behaviour and minor hockey parents' established brand associations of tournaments to gain insight to parents' ideal tournament preferences. Expectancy-values theories of behaviour suggest that people are motivated by specific attributes, benefits, and attitudes that they expect will help them achieve a desired outcome (Ajzen, 1991). Noting the similarities of the link between the aforementioned concepts, the current study used the establishment of brand associations to uncover the characteristics that of an ideal tournament experience from the rep hockey parents' perspective. This insight offers information on what motivates rep hockey parents to allow their children to participate not just in tournaments but rep hockey as a whole. Based on this work being successfully completed, brand associations can continue to be used to highlight what specifically influences proxy decision-making in a variety of youth sport scenarios thus closing the research gap.

Similarly, within sport tourism research using brand association to gain an understanding of consumer decisions is limited. Specifically, studying brand associations

to understand why tourists travel to particular destinations is rare. Typically, research that has investigated the reasons why people select certain destinations to travel to has involved the push-pull motivational framework (Crompton, 1979; Klenosky, 2002; Sirakaya & McLellan, 1997). The push-pull framework is designed to find the factors that impact two separate decisions that occur at two different points in time (Dann, 1977). Push factors relate to the higher order needs and wants of an individual such as social interface, relaxation, escape, belonging, adventure, and health (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977). Within minor rep hockey, the push factors for a parent to travel to a tournament are limited because travelling to and participating in tournaments is entrenched in the culture and experience (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). Conversely, pull factors are associated with a more micro level focus on features, attributes and benefits of consumption (Dann, 1977; Klenosky, 2002). Pull factors are often reflected in the branding efforts of an event or destination (Chalip & Costa, 2005). As a result, the brand association of a particular tournament could be considered a reflection of all of the prominent pull factors influencing hockey parents' decision to attend the event.

Previous uses of the push-pull motivational framework provide limited detail on the interconnection between the identified push and pull factors that led to the commitment to travel to a particular destination. By comparison, the expectancy-values theory of behaviour posit that a product or service (tournament) possess attributes that will produce particular benefits/consequences (Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984). Similarly, brand associations reflect the attributes and benefits of selecting a particular brand (Keller, 1993). Ultimately, the more favourable that the perceived outcome of a tournament, the more likely a person will choose it (Arjzen, 1991). Therefore, the

researcher believed that by applying the foundation of the expectancy-values theory of behaviour, through the laddering interview technique to evaluate brand associations of minor hockey tournaments from the perspective of parents, he will be able to advance the understanding of a parent's ideal sporting event for their child to travel to and participate in.

Chapter Outline

The remainder of this manuscript will summarize a review of literature, outline the research methods that were undertaken to complete the investigation, present findings with excerpts from interviews with respondents, discuss the implications of the findings, and provide directions for future research. The review of literature is found in chapter two and consists of a summary of proxy decision-making, brand, and sport tourism literature that was used to shape the scope of this study. Specifically, chapter two will discuss: expectancy-value theories, defining a brand, service brands, sport events as a service brand, destination brands, branding, co-branding, brand touch-points, brand equity, brand awareness, brand association, and the push-pull motivational frameworks.

Chapter three provides insight to the methodological aspects of the current study beginning with dialogue discussing the research sample. Under the heading of research sample, details will be provided regarding participant selection criteria, sampling procedures, and recruiting strategies. The discussion about the research sample will be followed by dialogue discussing data collection—specifically laddering interviews—which generated the crux of the data for this study. Also, within the data collection selection interview preparation materials, pilot interviews, and previous research that used laddering interviews will be discussed. The details on data collection will be followed by

a discussion on the coding and construction of an implication matrix that formed the data analysis phase of this study. Finally, chapter three will close with a dialogue about rigour including details on trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, credibility, and reflexivity.

Following the discussion on research methods, chapter four presents the findings of the study. Specifically, the chapter begins with a detailed breakdown of the demographics of the sample and is followed by a presentation of the Attribute-Benefit Model that was constructed for this study. Each element of the Attribute-Benefit Model is described using excerpts from the interviews conducted with research respondents. Chapter five closes this manuscript by discussing the findings in terms of their practical and academic applications. Also, chapter five will consist of a presentation of recommendations for future research, limitations of the current study, and the author's concluding thoughts.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This research project was designed to analyze the brand associations of minor hockey tournaments from the perspective of hockey parents. Parents are the primary economic driver of these events, which makes it important for tournament organizers to understand brand associations that parents connect with tournaments and how these associations might impact destination preferences. The findings of this research allowed the researcher to formulate brand strategy recommendations for tournament organizers. The scope of this study was shaped by literature in three areas of study including: parental proxy decision-making, brand theory, and sport tourism. This chapter will now discuss the supporting literature from each area of study.

Proxy Decision-Making

Prior to studying brand associations, one must identify who the primary purchasers of the brand are. For this particular study, rep hockey parents have been identified as the primary purchasers of a tournament experience. Many studies on youth sport participation have identified parents as a proxy for their child's participation in a particular sport or specific participatory level of competition (e.g., Chard, et al., 2015; Green & Chalip, 1998; Schwab, Wells, Arthur-Banning, 2010). Specifically, Green and Chalip (1998) noted, "although children are the users of youth sport services, it is the parents who are the purchasers" (p.95). Further, Schwab et al. (2010) indicated that, "in youth sports, both parents and children are the customers, and administrators need to satisfy both groups to ensure customer loyalty" (p. 41). Studies of proxy decision-making have also been produced in areas such as: education, palliative medicine, persons with disabilities, and sport psychology (e.g., Coyne, 2008; Jackson, Cheater, & Reid, 2008;

Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009; Mitchell, 2012; Yoshioka, 1984).

Recently, there has been an increase of interest in understanding the roles significant others or family members play in decision-making processes (Mitchell, 2012). Specifically, in sport management, limited research exists that has explored the influences of proxy decision-making, for example, parents' decision making for their child (Chard et al., 2015). Green and Chalip (1998) highlighted the gap in sport management literature by noting, "the antecedents and consequences of parents' decisions when purchasing a sport experience for their children are not well understood" (p.95). Therefore, one of the aims of the current study is to contribute to the aforementioned gap in the sport management literature by providing insight into to the perceived attributes and benefits that rep hockey parents associate with high quality tournament experiences. Achieving a greater understanding of parents' antecedents and ongoing expectations of youth sport programs—including tournament offerings—can assist administrators in establishing parents' loyalty and further support for a youth sport program (Schwab et al., 2010).

Expectancy-value theories of behaviour. Proxy decision-making can be understood by drawing on expectancy-value theories of behaviour. While there have been numerous expectancy-value cognitive theories developed within social psychology, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) are the most widely applied models (Ajzen, 2011). At their core, expectancy-value theories of behaviour assume that behaviour and/or intentional behaviours are a function of expectancy. Specifically, the TRA/TPB posit that a product or service possess attributes that will produce particular benefits/consequences (Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984). As will

be discussed later in this chapter, how consumers perceive a particular brand is reflective of the perceived attributes and benefits/consequences associated with the brand.

In terms of purchase decisions and brand evaluation, consumer attitudes toward certain behaviours are of particular importance. Within the TPB, one can determine a person's attitude toward a behaviour by considering behavioural beliefs and evaluation of behavioural outcomes. The TPB was developed as an extension of the TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Both theories suggest that attitudes have a significant impact on an individual's intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Specifically, attitudes are developed from the beliefs that people hold about the object of attitude (i.e., person, place, issue, event, or a specific behaviour; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Furthermore, by associating certain attributes to an object of attitude, a person formulates their beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). When considering a person's attitude towards behaviour, attitude is linked to a particular outcome, for example, which behaviour results in a favourable or an unfavourable result (Cunningham & Kwon, 2003). Due to the link between behaviour and outcomes, individuals learn to favour behaviours that they believe will produce a beneficial outcome while forming negative attitudes towards behaviours that are associated with undesirable consequences (Ajzen, 1991). The idea of a person performing particular behaviours to attain valued outcomes has been specifically applied in the sport industry to highlight volunteer and consumer motivations (e.g., Andrew, 1996; Cunningham & Kwon, 2003; Elstad, 1996; Funk & James, 2004; Trail & James, 2001).

In sum, the TRA and TPB suggest that most human behaviour is goal-directed (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). More specifically, people are motivated by attributes which they expect will allow them to achieve a desired outcome (goal) or benefit (Chard et al.,

2015). For example, a parent may prefer to see their child's team participate in a local tournament (i.e., attribute) because it limits the stress of travel (i.e., benefit) and added hotel expenditure (i.e., benefit). Therefore, a brand's influence on a consumer is better understood by considering the characteristics of the purchase decision. Characteristics of the purchase decision that should be considered include "who is the decision for?" and "how are options evaluated by the decision maker?" The next section of this chapter will define a brand and discuss the elements of brand theory as they apply to the current study.

Defining a Brand

"Brand" has evolved into one of the most frequently used managerial terms and a core focus of modern day marketing (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Knapp, 2000). The perspective of the term brand no longer only includes products or packaged goods (Knapp, 2000). The term brand is now associated with service organizations (Berry, 2000), travel destinations (Chalip & Costa, 2005), events (Funk, 2008), universities (Judson, Gorchels, & Aurand, 2006), and corporations (Aaker, 1991). Indeed, Grimaldi (2003) asserts that anything can be considered a brand, because a brand is an idea that exists in the consumer's mind (Knapp, 2000). Despite the various applications for the term, the function of a brand remains consistent. Specifically, the purpose of a brand is to act as shorthand for a product or service (Chalip & Costa, 2005), which allows targeted consumers to distinguish amongst the clutter of similar offerings by competitors (Aaker, 1991; Berry, 2000; Knapp, 2000). Therefore, minor hockey tournaments are definitely brands and it is the associations attached to those brands that affect the perceptions of minor hockey parents towards the tournaments.

Service Brands

It has been acknowledged that the principal success driver for service organizations is their brand (Berry, 2000). Service organizations include medical practices (Iacobucci, 1998), restaurants (Berry, 2000), vacation resorts (Chalip & Costa, 2005), and sport organizations (Funk, 2008). Regardless of the industry that a service organization belongs to, each is distinguished by the following three attributes: intangibility, production and consumption simultaneously, and heterogeneity (Iacobucci, 1998). All three attributes have a significant impact on shaping the delivery of a service to consumers which will positively or negatively affect the equity of the service brand (Berry, 2000; Iacobucci, 1998). The significant impact of a brand on service organizations is explained by Berry (2000):

Strong brands increase customers' trust of the invisible purchase. Strong brands enable customers to better visualize and understand intangible products. [Brands] reduce customers' perceived monetary, social or safety risk in buying services, which are difficult to evaluate prior to purchase (p.128).

In order to develop consumers' trust—the key attribute of the most valuable and effective service brands—a quality delivery of the service must take place (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Due to the personal nature of most of the tasks performed by service providers and the competition within the service industry, it is a necessity for a service brand to be associated with quality and trust. As indicated by Berry (2000), a strong service brand is a promise of future satisfaction and designates an organization as trustworthy amongst the clutter of the service industry. Satisfaction is defined as being an effective response to the cognitive evaluations of products and services (Otto & Ritchie, 1995). If a service brand

is unable to satisfy customers and generate the necessary trust to continue to utilize the service, the organization will not be successful. Three distinct types of service brands—sport organizations, destination brands, and event brands—as well as how they relate to the current study are described in the following three sections.

Sport organizations. Sport organizations can be considered brands. Specifically, sport organizations can be considered service brands as they share defining attributes that are similar to other service organizations including: intangibility, production and consumption simultaneously and heterogeneity. In addition, sport organizations are also subject to unpredictability, which makes the management of such organizations difficult (Ross, 2007). Sport organizations and their success, similar to other service organizations, are inherently reliant on the quality of service that is delivered to stakeholders (Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005). Sport managers aim to provide an exceptional customer service experience that generates a desire to return, regardless of the outcome of the event (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). In the context of small amateur sport organizations or small recurring sport events—the focal point of this study—Kaplanidou and Gibson (2012) noted satisfaction with the sport event or participation opportunity serves as a key variable in one's decision to participate in or attend again.

Minor hockey tournaments accurately fall into the category of a sporting event, which is best viewed as a service brand because they also reflect the same service defining characteristics mentioned above. More specifically, brands often reflect how a product or service will establish a desired level of satisfaction for customers and this is no different when the destination of a brand is considered. The influence that destination and

event brands have on a consumer's travel preferences are of particular interest to this study. Destination and event brands are further discussed in the following sections.

Destination brands. Branding places as destinations—places to visit—has been a focus of public administration globally since the 1970s (Hankinson, 2009; Ward, 1998). Specifically, researchers consider destination branding to consist of three elements: brand personality, image, and elements (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Cai, 2002; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). Further, destination branding is considered a product of experiential marketing, which denotes consumers as emotional beings who are seeking pleasurable experiences (Williams, 2006). Similar to other service brands, the perception of whether a tourist's needs and wants have or will be met will ultimately determine whether an individual is satisfied with a destination brand (Hennessey, Macdonald, & Maceachern, 2008; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). Once again, satisfaction refers to an effective response to the cognitive evaluations of products and services (Otto & Ritchie, 1995) and is a key motive in determining whether one will revisit a location (Hennessey et al., 2008; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007).

Currently, in the ultra-competitive tourism marketplace, many locations are branded using similar imagery such as: beaches, all-inclusive resorts, historic sites, and nature. Further, current destination brand messages seem to all include similar sentiments about: family/couple friendly communities, escaping reality, and discovering something (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). Due to the competitive tourism marketplace, destination brands cannot be deemed prominent by solely relying on the architectural or natural attributes of a location to attract or retain consumers (Kim & Chalip, 2004). Offering iconic locations for tourists may not be adequate enough as tourists associate value with

the depth of an experience, asking are their needs and wants optimally met? (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005; Kim & Chalip, 2004). Therefore, the need for destinations to establish a unique identity in order to differentiate themselves from competitors within cluttered tourism markets has never been greater (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). As a result of this need to uniquely differentiate a destination's brand from other locations' brands, many destinations have resorted to hosting events—specifically sporting events (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008; Xing & Chalip, 2006). The next section will discuss event brands within the context of sport.

Event brands. Within the marketing orientation of sport events, brands have evolved to become significant attributes for destination marketing (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Specifically, branding a destination or developing a destination's image is often a result of associating the appeal of an event with the features of a particular location (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Similar to destination brands, the appeal and success of sport events are inherently reliant on two elements: brand personality and image (Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, & Blaszk, 2013). Further, since sporting events—like tourist destinations—are considered services, the service quality that is associated with the events by patrons significantly impacts the brand's personality and image (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008).

Minor hockey tournaments are events, therefore their brands are subject to the same influences that impact other event brands. Specifically, the brands of minor hockey tournaments are inherently reliant on the quality of service and level of satisfaction associated with their events by parents – a significant stakeholder in the event. Within sport, understanding consumer perceptions of brands has become an increasingly important component of the marketing orientation (Ross, Bang, & Lee, 2007). This study

aims to aid tournament organizers by providing a detailed understanding of the underlying brand associations or perceptions that influence the key consumers of their event—minor hockey parents. With this information, tournament organizers will be equipped to effectively evaluate their events in terms of customer expectations, develop the necessary positive mental associations with their stakeholders, and ultimately contribute to the continued success of their respective events. The overall evaluation of customer expectation and mental associations of a tournament's brand will aid the organizer(s) during the process of improving the branding strategy of the event. The following two sections will discuss the details and the importance of branding.

Branding

Branding has become a prominent focus of managers since brands have been accepted as one of the most important assets of an organization (Ambler, 2003). Branding consists of moving beyond distinguishable brand attributes to build a brand identity based on brand personality and a relationship with consumers (Aaker, 1994). And, given that brands are experienced holistically by consumers (Knapp, 2000), a brand's identifiable features must be associated with value and excellent service in order to positively register within the consciousness of the consumer (Aaker, 1994; Knapp, 2000). Understanding that the success of brands is most significantly impacted by a consumer's experience with the brand has altered the process of branding. Indeed, strong brands are best described as those that have risen above other brands by consistently fulfilling and surpassing consumer expectations (Keller, 1998). Achieving a positive relationship with targeted consumers through branding can lead to long term equity for the brand. In some cases, brands—typically two—are strategically linked together to ensure that consumer

expectations are fulfilled; thus maximizing the equitable potential of the linked brands. This process is called co-branding and will be discussed in the next section.

Co-branding. Expanding on the concept of branding, linking the features of two brands in order to leverage and maximize the equity of each brand is known as co-branding (Brown, Chalip, Jago, & Mules, 2004; Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003). Within the context of sport, co-branding is considered a common practice in the areas of sponsorship (e.g., Howard & Sandeep, 2010; Tsiotsou, Alexandris, & Bettina-Cornwell, 2014) and tourism (e.g., Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Xing & Chalip, 2006). Also, celebrity endorsement (a type of co-branding) is one of the most prominent strategies used to market athletes (Avery & Rosen, 2005; Ilicic & Baxter, 2014; Lee & Park, 2014). Research indicates that the success of co-branding efforts is directly related to the degree in which the two brands fit together (Cunha, Forehand, & Angle, 2014; Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Hult, 2004; Xiao & Lee, 2014).

The co-branding that takes place between a destination and event can be applied to the focus of this study; however, with the exception of a few (i.e., Bell Capital Cup, Quebec International PeeWee Hockey Tournament, and The Brick Invitational Hockey Tournament) minor hockey tournaments are not regularly used to strategically enhance a destination's image or promote tourism products. Typically, it is major sporting events that are commonly used as a strategy to enhance a destination's image or increase the attention brought to its tourism products (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Also, a destination's image or brand can be used to support that of a particular sport event (i.e., Brantford, Ontario and Kamloops, British Columbia; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). Both the cities of Brantford and Kamloops have branded themselves as tournament destinations.

Respectively, Brantford has been branded as the Tournament Capital of Ontario (City of Brantford, 2012) and Kamloops has been branded as Canada's Tournament Capital (Kamloops, 2015). Both communities actively seek out opportunities to host tournaments and actively support them with public programs (City of Brantford, 2012; Kamloops, 2015).

The processes of branding and co-branding can be aided by managing the points in which a consumer interacts with the brand. Specifically, identifying the touch points of a brand and managing them to foster a positive relationship with consumers can lead to long-term success for the brand (George, 2003). The following section will identify the various touch points of a brand and discuss their importance.

Brand Touch Points

As explained earlier in this chapter, brand management—particularly service brand management—is about fostering a relationship with consumers. In the current context, the relationship is between rep hockey parents and minor hockey tournaments. This particular relationship is established through the various points of contact a tournament has with a rep hockey parent. Identifying all of the points of contact between a brand and consumers, as well as utilizing each contact point to assist in establishing a relationship with the consumers, is considered to be the first step in improving brand management (George, 2003; Hollis, 2008). Aaker (1996) claims that managers should monitor the interactions consumers have with their brands because each organizational touch point leaves an impression on customers, employees, and stakeholders. Davis and Dunn (2002) deemed interactions with organizational touch points as brand-builders. Further, brand-

building interactions are considered to be part of one of three categories: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase.

Pre-purchase. Conceptually, this category can be seen as two phases: awareness generation and brand selection. First, recognition and developing a rapport with consumers is a key factor for the brand experience (Aaker, 1996) as organizational touch points serve to influence whether the brand will be considered in consumers' final decision-set. George (2003) suggests that, "some typical pre-purchase touch points include websites, word-of-mouth, direct mail, research, sponsorships, public relations, and advertising" (para. 4). Awareness of a minor hockey tournament is typically generated through a website, recruitment of teams, and parents sharing their experiences with others.

The second phase of the pre-purchase stage is brand selection. During this stage consumers are encouraged to complete their evaluation of prospective brands and move to brand selection (Davis & Longoria, 2003). It is here where the prestige of the tournament or host location may be touted to alter one's perception of the event.

Purchase. There are three goals when considering the purchase touch points: adhering to the brand promise, meeting or exceeding customer expectations, and increasing brand loyalty or advocacy (George, 2003). As with any service, failure to deliver on consumer expectations will result in dissatisfaction (Chard, MacLean, & Faught, 2013). Frequently dissatisfied consumers – specifically in the service industry – will lead to low levels of brand loyalty. For example, a tournament that advertises itself as an elite AAA tournament but fails to deliver this level of competition to its entrants will cause them to leave untested and their promises unfulfilled.

Post-purchase. Post-purchase touch points share the same goals as purchase touch points: adhering to the brand promise, meeting or exceeding customer expectations, and increasing brand loyalty or advocacy (George, 2003). Commonly following sales, post-purchase touch points go under used or ignored even though they are significant factors in obtaining sustainable business growth (George, 2003). Some examples of post-purchase touch points are customer loyalty programs, customer satisfaction surveys, and warranty or rebate activities (George, 2003). Due to the structure of minor hockey loyalty, only customer satisfaction surveys would be applicable. Indeed, consistent with previous research, these instruments are under used by tournament organizers thus assisting in the emphasis of this research.

Ultimately, properly identifying and using brand touch points significantly impacts the success of a brand. More specifically, touch points generate brand equity as they create awareness, establish associations, provide perceptions of quality, and lead to loyalty from consumers. All of the aforementioned products of properly managing brand touch points are elements of brand equity, and establishing positive brand equity should be the goal of any manager. The following section will provide further detail on two of the key drivers of brand equity – brand awareness and brand association – that are of particular interest to this investigation.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is defined as, “the ability of [the consumer] to recognize and recall the brand when provided a cue” (Berry, 2000, p.129). Brand awareness ranges from low-level brand recognition, where the consumer must be aided in order to recall a brand, to top-of-mind awareness where the consumer identifies a brand in a particular product or

service category without being aided (Aaker, 1991). The concept of brand awareness has been identified as a driver of brand equity (Aaker 1991, Berry, 2000; Keller, 1993) because it affects consumer decision making by influencing the formation and strength of brand associations (Keller, 1993). Specifically, brand awareness is an important part of brand equity because it affects consumer decision making by influencing the formation and strength of brand associations (Keller, 1993).

While brand awareness is a driver of brand equity, it cannot generate sales alone (Aakers, 1991). Regardless of how beneficial the product or service is to the consumer, without awareness it will never be experienced. The service-branding model indicates that brand awareness is developed through the company's presented brand and external brand communication (Berry, 2000). The company's presented brand is defined as the "brand message a company conceptualizes and disseminates" (Berry, 2000, p.129). A memorable brand message can be created by using a slogan, jingle, symbol exposure, publicity, event sponsorship, brand extensions, and many other tactics (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness is also generated indirectly through external brand communication. External brand communication commonly consists of WOM communication and publicity (Berry, 2000). When purchasing a service, or in the case of this research attending a minor hockey tournament, consumers tend to actively seek and rely on personal sources through WOM, therefore understanding the perceptions of one's service brand held by consumers is crucial (Berry, 2000; Ross, 2006). Consumers' perception of an organization's brand is arguably the most valuable marketing asset for managers to understand in order to effectively manage their organization (Berry, 2000; Keller, 1993; Ross et al., 2006). Given this importance to the overall success of a brand, understanding

brand associations of tournaments is the focus of this study. As noted in previous sections, the purpose of this study is to understand the brand associations of an ideal tournament experience from the perspective of hockey parents.

Brand Association

Brand association refers to thoughts, ideas, or dominant perceptions that individuals hold in their memory for a particular good or service (Aaker, 1991; Berry, 2000; Keller; 1993). There are many perspectives of brand association. Aaker (1991) divides brand association into 11 categories, which include product attributes, intangibles, customer benefits, relative price, use or application, user or customer, celebrity or person, lifestyle, product class, competitors, and geographic area. Biel (1992) presents a different perspective of brand association by arguing that brand association is a product of functional and emotional attributes. Chen (2001) divides brand association into product and organizational associations. Product and organizational associations are respectively divided into two subcategories, which include functional, non-functional, corporate ability, and corporate social responsibility associations (Chen, 2001). Davis (2002) considers brand associations as part of a ladder approach that allows for the overall power of the brand benefits and ultimately brand value to be determined. Through the various perspectives of brand association, Keller's (1993) presentation of CBBE (see Figure 2) has widely been considered to contain the most complete conceptual presentation of brand association and has been applied to numerous brand association studies within the sport industry (Gladden & Funk 2002; Kaynak et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2006). As a result of its common application to the sport industry, Keller's (1993) presentation of CBBE will be considered the framework of this study.

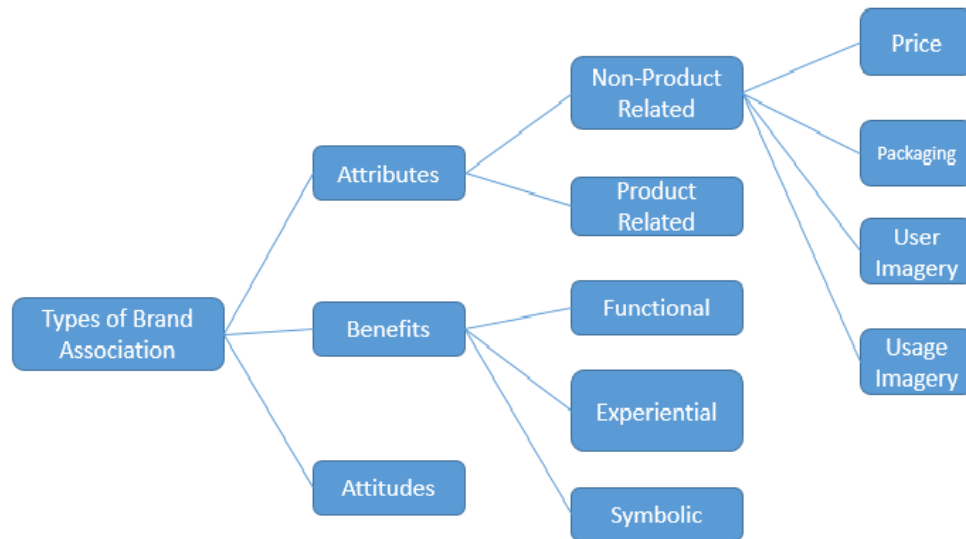


Figure 2: Keller's (1993) Consumer Based Brand Equity Model – Brand Association Section

Keller's (1993) model indicates that brand association is a significant driver in the brand image developed by consumers, which ultimately plays an important role in the purchasing decision and overall generation of brand equity. As seen in the model, Keller (1993) proposes that brand associations can be classified as attributes, benefits, or attitudes. This classification has been supported and used as the conceptual framework for many brand association studies in both the realm of marketing management and sport management. Davis (2002) expands on Keller's (1993) classification of brand association through his proposal of the Brand Value Pyramid. The Brand Value Pyramid consists of three sections with a brand's features or attributes forming the base, brand benefits forming the middle section, and the top portion formed by beliefs or values – which can also be associated with attitudes (Davis, 2002). By introducing the Brand Value Pyramid, Davis (2002) aimed to explain that brand association is the key to establishing a prominent brand. Brand attributes, benefits, and attitudes will now be explained in greater detail.

Brand attributes. Keller (1993) describes brand attributes as the descriptive features that characterize a product or service. Attributes can be categorized in many ways; Keller (1993) has distinguished attributes as product related and non-product related. An attribute is categorized according to how directly it relates to the performance of the product or service (Keller, 1993).

Product-related attributes. Product related attributes are generally described as the elements at the core of the product function or service delivery; these can vary based on the category of the product or service (Keller, 1993; O'Cass & Grace, 2003). From a sport perspective, Gladden and Funk (2002) note that the most prominent product related attributes are those that directly impact the performance of a team (i.e., coaching and management). From the perspective of a sport organization that is not a team, such as a minor hockey organization or tournament, the most prominent service-related attributes would be the staff and organizers responsible for delivering the event or hockey related services. Indirectly associated with a tournament, a hotel's staff would be responsible for delivering the accommodation services needed for teams to have an enjoyable stay through the duration of the tournament. Consistent with Berry (2000), staff are both responsible for the delivery of the service and making up the prominent defining attributes of the service. As Garbarino and Johnson (1999) suggest, consumer-decision making is guided by trust, which is derived from the product or service-related attributes. For any service or sport organization, consumers establishing any reason to distrust the staff of the organization will result in a negative brand association or meaning.

Non-product related attributes. In contrast, non-product related or non-service related attributes have an effect on purchasing decisions but do not directly impact the

overall performance or delivery of the product or service (Keller, 1993; Kaynak et al., 2008). As identified by Keller (1993) the customer-based equity model identifies price, packaging, user imagery, and usage imagery as the most prominent attributes that consumers use to generate brand associations. Within the service and sport industry the consumer's experience with service or event offering has the greatest impact on the formation of a brand association or meaning (Berry, 2000; Gladden & Funk, 2002). The customer's association with a sporting event or other service organization can be established solely based on the level of service that the organization or event offers. As indicated by Hyatt and Chard (2013) producing a quality event or service is not a straightforward concept due to the many stakeholders that must be accounted for in the delivery of the service. Producing a quality event or service is not defined just in terms of physical specifications. Quality is conceived in terms of meeting the consumer's expectations (Hyatt & Chard, 2013). Ultimately, it is a combination of both types of brand attributes (product and non-product) and their resulting brand associations that will form a unique brand image that is to be maintained by the brand manager (Aaker, 1996).

Brand benefits. Brand benefits are what the consumer believes the product can do for them (Keller, 1993; Kaynak et al., 2008). Indeed, Keller (1993) presents that benefits signify the psychological meaning and consequence that consumers attach to a product or service. The customer-based equity model categorizes benefits according to their underlying motivation which results in three types of benefits including: functional benefits, symbolic benefits, and experiential benefits (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986 as cited by Keller, 1993).

Functional benefits. Functional benefits are, “the intrinsic advantages of product or service consumption and usually correspond to the product-related attributes” (Keller, 1993, p. 156). Furthermore, functional benefits are often linked to basic motivations like physiological and safety needs, which are often considered the basis of the majority of consumption related problems (Keller, 1993). As a result, consumers regularly seek out the functional benefits of products or services to resolve their consumption related issues (Park et al., 1986). Within the sport industry, functional benefits have been analyzed from the perspective of being a fan of a professional team (Gladden & Funk, 2002). From a hockey parent’s perspective, the functional benefits of a tournament could include: host community’s proximity to home, number of guaranteed games for their child’s team to play, and cost of travel.

Experiential benefits. Experiential benefits are explained as the desires for products that offer sensory pleasure and cognitive stimulation (Park et al., 1986). Keller (1993) expands on the definition by explaining that experiential benefits refer to what it feels like to use the product or service. The feelings associated with using a particular brand significantly impact brand loyalty as many consumers will become loyal to a brand based on the feelings generated from interacting with the brand (Aaker, 1991). Within sport, the most prominent examples of experiential benefits that have been identified are pride and nostalgia. Pride and nostalgia have been cited as the most prominent feelings experienced by sport fans when cheering for or thinking about the brand of their respective favourite teams (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kaynak et al., 2008; Ross, 2006). Pride and nostalgia can also be considered when tournament destination preferences are considered. For example, a parent may be satisfied with travelling a long distance to

participate in the International Silver Stick tournament—one of the oldest and most prestigious minor hockey tournaments in North America.

Symbolic benefits. Keller (1993) identifies symbolic benefits as extrinsic advantages of product or service consumption. Symbolic benefits correspond to non-product related attributes and respond to internally generated needs such as social acceptance or outer directed self-esteem (Keller, 1993; Park et al., 1986). Brands with a symbolic concept must be socially relevant to the individual with a desired group, role, or self-image (Keller, 1993; Kaynak et al., 2008). Brand association research within sport has identified that sport (whether it is through participation or fandom) offers individuals the opportunity to fulfill the need to be socially accepted within a desired community (Gladden & Funk, 2002). As has been explained, symbolic benefits meet the most abstract needs of the consumer. Brand attitudes, the most abstract classification of brand association, will now be discussed.

Brand attitudes. Attitudes are the most abstract form of brand association. Brand attitudes are important because they form the basis for consumer behaviour (Keller, 1993; Kaynak et al., 2008). Brand attitudes are considered the consumer's overall evaluation of the brand which is reliant upon the appealing nature of brand attributes and benefits (Keller, 1998). Therefore, brand attitudes are a function of the brand attributes and benefits that are salient to the brand (Keller, 1993). It is through brand attitudes that the values and beliefs of consumers become connected to the brand (Davis, 2002; Katz, 1960; Lutz, 1991; Zeithaml, 1988). The importance of the connection to the beliefs and values of the consumer is highlighted by Davis' (2002) point that "although attributes and benefits can be replicated by a competitor, emotional values are virtually untouchable"

(p.55). Furthermore, Berry (2000) explains that, “great [service] brands always make an emotional connection with their intended audience. [Strong service brands] reach beyond the purely rational and purely economic level to spark feelings of closeness, affection, and trust” (p. 134). Furthermore, brand attitudes have been hypothesized to mediate the formation of strong brand associations based upon attributes and benefits (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Sport industry research on brand attitudes has been focused on fandom. Specifically, Gladden and Funk (2002) highlight with their Team Association Model (TAM) that sport brand attitudes are based on psychological importance, knowledge, and affective reactions to a particular team.

The Importance of Studying Brand Associations

As discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, the importance of studying brand associations in the context of this study provides sport managers with further insight of what influences the decisions of those consuming youth sporting services and sport tourism opportunities. Also, studying brand association research in this project’s context has significant practical implications for tournament operators. The following sections will re-iterate each of these topics.

Sport consumer decision-making and current brand association models. To reiterate the opening chapter and the preceding literature review there is indeed a gap in the sport management literature with respect to the influence that brand associations have on purchase decisions. Currently, knowledge of the influence that brand associations have is limited to the application of the TAM and Team Brand Association Scale professional and collegiate sports. The aforementioned models have limited transferability because youth sport lack the fandom and consumer-influencing characteristics of professional or

collegiate sports. Different from typical fan related consumption decisions, consuming a youth sport service typically involves a parent acting as proxy decision-maker for their child. Indeed, research regarding proxy decision-making in sport is limited but this phenomenon is crucial for operators of youth sporting services to understand. Specifically, operators of youth sporting services must be mindful of how parents perceive the attributes and benefits of their service.

As the decision-making literature highlighted, people are motivated by specific attributes, benefits, and attitudes that will contribute to producing a favourable outcome for their decisions. When consumer decision-making is considered, consumers are inherently reliant on brands reflecting their particular motivations in order to help them differentiate products or services within a cluttered marketplace. The brand that associates best with the attributes and decision-making outcome that motivates the consumers considering the brand will most likely be selected. Indeed, there is a link between the establishment of brand associations and expectancy-values theories of behaviour. Noting the similarities of the link between the aforementioned concepts, the current study used the establishment of brand associations to uncover the characteristics of an ideal tournament experience from the rep hockey parents' perspective. This insight contributes to closing the research gap that exists regarding brand associations and youth sporting services. Specifically, the insights of this research could be used to investigate participation motivations and preferences of parents in other sports, which would also contribute to closing the research gap with regards to proxy decision-making in sport. The following sections will highlight the importance of applying to consumer behaviour studies in sport tourism.

Sport tourism. Within the global travel and tourism industry, sport tourism has been identified as the industry's fastest growing sector (Gibson & Fairley, 2013). This notion is highlighted by the Canadian sport tourism industry reaching an estimated value of \$5.2 billion in 2012 (Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance [CSTA], 2014). Further, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance (CSTA), Rick Traer, called sport tourism a "significant part of the Canadian economy" (CSTA, 2014, para. 6). In particular, hockey has a significant place within the sport tourism industry as it accounts for over \$2.6 billion (O' Reilly et al., 2015). This further emphasizes the work of Mason and Duquette (2008), who recommended that, due to hockey's impact on the Canadian economy and place within Canadian culture, it should be used by communities as a vehicle for tourism.

Gibson (1998a; 1998b) defined sport tourism as encompassing three main types of travel and sport participation: active sport tourism, event sport tourism, and nostalgia sport tourism. Within the context of this study, minor hockey tournaments encompass both active and event sport tourism. Active sport tourism takes place when one travels to participate in a sporting event (i.e., a child travelling with their parent to take part in a hockey tournament) and event sport tourism takes place when one travels to watch a sporting event (i.e., a parent travelling to watch their child play in a hockey tournament; Gibson 1998a; 1998b). Amateur sport events, which encompass both active and event sport tourism have grown in recent years (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). Many of these amateur sport events are hosted by community organizations (i.e., minor hockey association) and have the ability to attract both competitors and spectators from inside and outside the local community (Gibson, Kaplanidou, & Kang, 2012). Overall, sport

tourism can be used as a tool to achieve sustainable economic growth (Gibson & Fairley, 2013; Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003; Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005).

Due to the growth and the economic stimulating potential of sport tourism, it has received increased attention from academics, sport managers, and community officials (Gibson & Fairley, 2013). Of those groups studying sport tourism, understanding motives impacting destination selection and intent to return as well as the process of leveraging a sport event's appeal with the host community has been of particular interest (e.g., Funk, Toohey, & Bruun, 2007; Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005; Hennessey et al., 2008; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2012; Klenosky, Gengler, & Mulvey, 1993; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008).

Past research on destination selection has relied on the push-pull motivational framework (Dann, 1977) to identify why consumers are "pushed" to travel and why they are "pulled" to a particular location. Previous applications of the push-pull motivational framework were focused on providing characteristics of the ideal destination for the travellers of a specific demographic rather than addressing how they select the destination they want to travel to. More specifically, the push-pull motivational framework provides limited detail on the interconnection between the identified push and pull factors that led to the commitment to travel to a particular destination.

By comparison, the TRA/TPB posit that a product or service (tournament) possess attributes that will produce particular benefits/consequences (Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984). Similarly, brand associations reflect the attributes and benefits of selecting a particular brand (Keller, 1993). By focusing on minor hockey tournament brand associations from the perspective of hockey parents, this study provides a more detailed

insight into the consumers' perceptions and considerations that take place when identifying a preferred destination to attend. As a result of focusing on brand associations, the researcher had a greater opportunity to transfer the findings of the study to improve the minor hockey industry and contributes to the void in the literature regarding the destination selection process of sport tourists. The final section of this chapter will discuss the important practical implications of studying brand associations.

Practical implications. Strong brand associations result in a brand having a positive image and prominent position in the memory of the consumer. Most importantly for brand managers, strong brand associations result in achieving a competitive advantage over other brands (Keller, 1993). Elements of this competitive advantage include customer loyalty, an ability to charge price premiums, the ability to sell new products or services through the brands endorsement power, and significant WOM referrals (Davis, 2002). Furthermore, due to sport organizations' reliance on sponsorship support, positive brand associations will increase the likelihood of retaining current sponsors as well as gaining new ones (Ross, Walsh, & Maxwell, 2009). All of the aforementioned benefits of having a strong brand association both directly and indirectly apply to establishing brand equity. Thus, the focus for brand managers should be on establishing and maintaining strong brand associations and positive image for their respective brands. Finally, all of the aforementioned benefits directly apply to and are obtainable for minor hockey organizations and tournament organizers if proper understanding of the requirements needed to establish strong brand associations are present.

Chapter 3 – Methods

This qualitative research was undertaken and completed with a post-positivist paradigmatic lens. For the purpose of this study, a form of semi-structured interviews known as laddering was conducted with rep hockey parents. The objective of these laddering interviews was to understand the key characteristics of an ideal tournament experience from the perspective of hockey parents. Laddering interviews were deemed an appropriate data collection method because they require the respondent “to look beyond easily identifiable attributes of a brand, service or product (i.e., colour, size, weight, taste etc.) and focus on benefits achieved from these attributes (i.e., happiness, comfort, savings etc.)” (Chard, et al., 2015, p.25). For the current research study, respondents associated the attributes and benefits they identified with the phenomenon of attending minor hockey tournaments. It was through these discussions that the researcher was able to garner an understanding for what is truly happening within the tournament phenomenon. Within the post-positivist paradigm it is the goal of the researcher to use a representative sample that clearly answers the question, “What is happening here?” (Tracy, 2013). The method used to garner responses from participants allowed the researcher to measure which brand attributes and benefits have the most significant impact on the tournament phenomenon. It is from this measurement, that tangible, objective recommendations have been formulated in order to enhance industry practitioners’ ability to successfully manage the tournament phenomenon. Together, the findings and recommendations of this contribute tangible, material knowledge on a little studied phenomenon in sport management—such contributions are the goal of post-positivist researchers (Tracy, 2013).

As was discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, parents of boys aged 12 and under playing rep hockey in Southern Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe Region were recruited for interviews, representing a purposeful sampling method. The remainder of this chapter will discuss in greater detail the sampling method, data collection, data analysis, limitations, and the rigour of this study.

Research Sample

In order to achieve the current study's objectives, interviews with hockey parents from the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region in Ontario, Canada were conducted and analyzed. Conclusions on the brand associations of minor hockey tournaments were made from these interview analyses.

Participant selection/sampling. The selection of participants was based on a purposeful sampling strategy using criterion and snowball sampling methods. The logic behind purposeful sampling lies in the selection of information-rich cases. Information-rich cases allow the researcher to select participants that contributed a great deal to the study's goals and purpose (Tracy, 2013). Creswell (2007) explains that criterion sampling is a technique where the researcher has a predetermined set of criteria for selecting participants. In other words, participants were purposefully chosen because they exhibit attributes or have experiences that fit the parameters of the study's questions, goals, and purposes (Tracy, 2013).

Additionally, a snowball sample was used in conjunction with criterion sampling. Snowball sampling is an alternative sampling method that is often used for reaching difficult-to-access or hidden populations (Tracy, 2013). Snowball sampling involves identifying participants who fit the study's criteria then using these individuals to provide

leads to other potential participants (Tracy, 2013). Due to the social culture of rep hockey teams, implementing a snowball sample was deemed appropriate. More specifically, the time commitment required of families involved in rep hockey causes parents of a team to interact with each other more frequently than their other social groups. As a result, the connections and bonds between parents become strong over the course of a six month season. Implementing a snowball sample ensured that respondents always met the sample criteria and that contact was never lost with this difficult-to-access population.

This investigation used a combination of geographic location, age, and level of minor hockey participation to develop the criteria for sample participant selection.

Specifically, the criteria for participant selection was as follows:

- I. The individual had to be the parent of a child who was playing tyke, novice, atom, or peewee (12 years-old and under) boys rep hockey for an organization within the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region (see Figure 3). This region is considered to be home to approximately 70% of Ontario's population making it one of the greater population concentrations in North America (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2006). Due to the location of the researcher and limited travelling resources, participant recruitment was primarily targeted in the Niagara Region. However, due to participant interest generated through word of mouth, targeted regions were expanded to include the regions of Brant, Hamilton, Halton, Haldimand, and Peel. Altogether, there are approximately 50 minor hockey organizations offering various levels of rep hockey within this geographic footprint.

- II. The individual had to be the parent of a child whose rep hockey team planned to participate in at least one rep hockey tournament during the 2014-2015 season.



Figure 3: Greater Golden Horseshoe Region (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2005)

Sampling procedures. Within qualitative research, no rule exists regarding sample size. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that sample size should reflect the number of participants necessary “to find out what you need to know” (p. 113). Sample size must also reflect the purpose of the study, the researcher’s time, and available resources (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). At the onset of this study, the researcher aimed to interview between 20 and 40 participants. A total sample of 30 respondents was achieved. The sample size of 30 was justified by considering that the sample size of similar studies that investigated destination selection by using the laddering interview method ranged from 28 (Chard et al., 2015) to 90 (Klenosky et al., 1993).

Recruiting strategies. The recruitment of research participants took place prior to and during the 2014-2015 hockey season. It was heavily reliant on the gatekeepers (Patton, 2002) of the tyke, novice, atom, and peewee rep hockey teams in the Niagara

Region. Gaining access to the sample through gatekeepers was a two-staged process. First, contact information for every head coach of a tyke, novice, atom, or peewee rep team in the Niagara Region was obtained. Also, due to participant recruitment beginning prior to the 2014-2015 season, the contact information of local pre-season hockey camp directors was gathered. Only coaches or camp directors whose information was available on their respective organization's website were included in the sampling frame. In total, 61 coaches and/or camp directors made up the sampling frame. Second, each coach and director was sent an introductory email (see Appendix A) explaining the purpose of the current investigation as well as requesting that the information be forwarded onto their respective team's parent group. In total, 13 coaches and/or camp directors agreed to share the information. Of the 13 gatekeepers, seven also agreed to be interviewed.

Beyond the coaches who agreed to be interviewed, the sample was expanded using two processes. First, the researcher followed up with the five parents who showed interest in participating following the initial information email sent to them by their child's coach. Specifically, through email exchanges or phone conversations the researcher and the respondent scheduled a time to meet and conduct a laddering interview. Typically, the interview times were centred on team events, such as a practice or game. Upon the completion of each interview, participants were asked to recommend any friends, family, or colleagues who would be interested in participating in the study. In total, 12 of the interviewees were recommended by family, friends, or colleagues who had previously completed an interview with the researcher. Second, while attending practices and games to conduct the laddering interviews—if time allowed following scheduled interviews—parents were approached at random and asked to participate in the

study. Overall, six of the research participants were recruited randomly following a scheduled interview. It should also be noted that the researcher uploaded a recruitment poster (see Appendix B) to popular online classified listing websites; to the knowledge of the researcher, no participant of this particular study was recruited through this form.

Data Collection

Interviews. For the purpose of this investigation, interviews were used as the data collection method. Interviews are described “as an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.2). More specifically, a form of semi-structured interviews were implemented and identified as interviews that have a purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life experiences of the interviewee in order to generate a well-defined understanding of a phenomena of interest to the researcher (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were best suited for the research process because this method allowed the researcher to guide the interview while still maintaining autonomy to probe the experiences and issues that were shared (Glesne, 1999). Qualitative interviews, regardless of type and structure, all aim to bring forth the concept of *verstehen*—meaning empathetic understanding of human behaviour—by elucidating lived experiences from the perspective of respondents (Tracy, 2013). For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted using the laddering technique.

Laddering. Laddering requires the researcher to guide each respondent up the ladder of abstraction during an in-depth, one-on-one interview (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). More specifically, laddering is best described as a probing technique that moves people from concrete attributes to more abstract benefits, consequences and values

(Chard et al., 2015). Typically, laddering is associated with means-end analyses which are used to investigate the personal values consumers associate with purchase decisions (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). For this particular research however, where proxy decision-making was the central focus, parents' personal values when evaluating tournament options for their child's team to participate in were less central to this investigation. Indeed, values indicate why we *personally* want something; however, the nature of a proxy decision involves making a decision for a third-party (Chard et al., 2015).

Unlike typical research interviews, which tend to include a variety of question types, laddering interviews are solely reliant on motive related questions (Tracy, 2013). Motive related questions are ideal for this investigation as they allowed the researcher to ask respondents about feelings and actions, and ultimately make inferences on one's behaviour (Tracy, 2013). Initial laddering interviews begin by eliciting a personally meaningful distinction that the respondent uses to discriminate among alternatives in the decision making process (Phillips & Reynolds, 2009). Typically, the distinctions that the respondent refers to are associated with a tangible attribute of the product or service that the researcher is focusing on (Klenosky, Gengler, & Mulvey, 1993). It is from this basic distinction that the respondent is asked a series of probing questions that ultimately uncover the higher-level of meaning, in this case benefits, associated with the product or service being researched (Klenosky et al., 1993; Phillips & Reynolds, 2009). Ultimately, laddering guides individuals to articulate "*why*" and "*how*" product attributes are important" (Klenosky et al., 1993, p.364).

Specifically, for this research, interviews typically occurred prior to a game beginning and a parent was in attendance waiting for the respective teams to take the ice.

Also, interviews took place during a practice when the minor hockey team was on the ice and the parent was in attendance. In either circumstance, those individuals who had identified a willingness to participate in the study were introduced to the researcher and taken, where possible, to a quiet room in the arena where the interviews were conducted. Due to the variety of arenas that were visited during the research process, not all offered quiet rooms and as a result some interviews were conducted in an arena bar, coffee shop, or lobby area. At the onset of the interview each participant was asked, “*Which tournaments have you been to or are planning on attending this season?*” Following this initial question respondents were asked, “*Can you please describe your tournament experiences from the current season and/or your expectations for any upcoming tournaments?*” Following these initial questions, the participants were probed with the recurring questions such as “*Why is that important to you?*” or “*What makes that important to the tournament experience?*” The process of probing was conducted for each identified attribute in order to determine the benefit(s) derived from the attribute. Probing ended when the respondent could no longer state any benefits associated with a stated attribute. In total, 29 of the 30 interviews were audio recorded and typically lasted between 10 and 30 minutes.

Interview preparation and materials. Thorough preparation was required in order to ensure that the researcher was able to collect the richest detail possible from the unique one-on-one interactions that laddering interviews create. Specifically, informed consent (see Appendix C) was obtained prior to commencing each interview. Participants were either recruited online via email or in-person at local ice rinks. For those participants who were recruited online, they were sent an introductory information letter

(see Appendix A) and their informed consent form (see Appendix C) via email. Each of these respondents was asked to read and complete the form and return it to the researcher at the scheduled interview. Prior to each interview, participants were asked if they understood the form and if they needed anything clarified. Informed consent forms were provided for those participants who either failed to return their forms prior to their scheduled interview or were recruited in-person. Due to the time constraints of eight of the participants who were recruited in person, the form was overviewed verbally with the participant then, verbal consent was granted. In the case of the one phone interview that was conducted, the form was read aloud to the participant; then verbal consent was granted. All participants were given a paper copy of their informed consent form and were sent their member check and thank you letter (see Appendix D) via email.

The researcher also had to ensure that the audio recording tools were in working order for each interview. Specifically, the researcher used the Voice Recorder Application on a Samsung S3 Galaxy Smartphone. The Voice Recorder Application, “allows you to record an audio file and then immediately share it using AllShare, Messaging, Gmail, or via Bluetooth” (Samsung, 2013., para 1) and comes pre-installed on most Samsung Smartphones. The Voice Recorder Application also allows for easy file transfer from the phone to a computer. During each interview (to counter unforeseen human or technological issues and to aid transcription) the researcher took detailed notes about the verbal and non-verbal communication elicited from each participant (Tracy, 2013).

One audio recorded file of each interview remains on the password protected computer of the researcher. A copy of each interview was transferred to a data storage

device which is stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home. Only the research knows the password to the aforementioned computer and has access to the locked filing cabinet's key. Each participant was informed of this detail as it is recorded on the informed consent form that was signed and or verbally reviewed prior to the commencement of each interview.

Pilot interviews. Prior to interviewing research respondents, three pilot interviews were conducted. The purpose of these pilot interviews was to allow the researcher to become comfortable with the laddering interview process, prepare for any potential challenges with respondents or audio recording equipment, and gauge the appropriateness of the interview questions. The pilot interviews were completed with one member of the thesis committee and two parents from outside the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region who have been involved in minor hockey for over 10 years. The data from the pilot interviews was not included in this manuscript.

Research utilizing laddering interviews. Many sport-related studies have featured laddering interviews as the primary source of data collection. While the studies vary in terms of the sport they are associated with, they all generally serve the purpose of investigating the personal values underlying sport consumers purchase decisions (Klenosky et al., 1993; Klenosky, Templin, & Troutman, 2001; Klenosky, 2002; Kirkup, 2008). More specifically, these studies investigate purchase decisions that range from ski resort destination selection (Klenosky et al., 1993) to student-athletes' school-choice decisions (Klenosky et al., 2001), and Olympic tourists' travel behaviour (Kirkup, 2008). As was discussed earlier in this chapter, laddering interviews are typically associated with means-end theory (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

Of particular importance to the researcher is the Chard et al. (2015) investigation of why parents enrol their child in rep hockey. This study is the most recent sport-related study that has investigated proxy decision-making by using the laddering interview technique. Further, Chard et al. (2015) identify that there is limited sport management literature existing on proxy decision making; thus, aiding the justification of the current investigation's value. Unlike the other studies mentioned above, Chard et al. (2015) used laddering interviews as their data collection method without employing means-end theory. Specifically, the work of Chard et al. (2015) was influenced by expectancy-value theories of behaviour such as the TPB and the TRA. As a result of this influence, Chard et al. (2015) were particularly focused on the attributes and benefits that influenced parents' decisions to enrol their child in rep hockey. Studies that used means-end theory as the framework recognized respondents as primary consumers and investigated the personal values that influence their decision making (as was discussed, personal values are not a central focus of this particular research). The following section will describe the data analysis process that was implemented.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of each interview the dialogue was transcribed verbatim. The interview process resulted in 193 attribute-benefit ladders being completed, which equates to an average of 6.4 ladders per subject. The first phase of analysis required the researcher to code each element of each ladder as either an attribute or a benefit (Klenosky et al., 2001). This process was aided by the researcher's detailed field notes from each interview which were used to steer participants up the ladder of abstraction. Furthermore, to deal with the criticisms surrounding the subjective nature of the coding

process, the researcher relied on personal experience within the minor hockey industry, sport-tourism destination selection literature (Klenosky et al., 1993; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2012), brand association literature (Keller, 1993), and parental proxy decision making literature (Green & Chalip, 1998; Chard et al., 2015) to define the codes. Second, content codes were established for each element of each ladder (Goldenberg, Klenosky, O’Leary, & Templin, 2000). Some of the content codes that were identified were: competition, travel requirements, fun, and bonding. Similar to the “cut-up and put into folders” method (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982) used in typical qualitative research, content categories were developed based on key words or phrases that arose during transcription (Klenosky et al., 2001). A sample of respondents’ ladders and coding assignment is presented in Table 2. Following the initial identification of the content codes by the primary researcher, discussions with some of the research committee were held to discuss the codes and analyze the relationships between them. Upon completion, seven attribute codes and nine benefit codes were identified.

Table 2: Sample of Respondents’ Ladders and Coding Assignments (Attributes-Benefits)

For me personally in a tournament you are looking for competitive games (Attribute – Competition)
You also want the kids to get experience dealing with pressure [of playing close games] and things like that-you know the life skill pieces that I think are really important. (Benefit – Life lessons)
So hockey is played in the winter so when you go away you want to make sure that you have a hotel that has an indoor pool (Attribute – Accommodations)
That is a big thing that allows the kids to get together. And then the parents can order food or hang by the pool and socialize and that is where bonding happens as well. (Benefit – Bonding)
And I don’t think it is necessary to travel all that far (Attribute – Travel requirements)
So you are immediately at a disadvantage to teams that live close (Benefit – Parity)
So the further you travel the greater the disadvantage that you have or the more time you got to take off work (Benefit – Time Management)

Once the data had been coded, an aggregate level implication matrix was constructed using the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet computer program (see Table 3). The implication matrix was used to identify the existing interrelationships amongst all the identified coded concepts. An aggregate level implication matrix records the number of times a pair of concepts that were constructed within the data analysis were associated together by a research respondent (Klenosky et al., 1993; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). For example, the implication matrix for this study shows that across all respondents' ladders, attribute three (i.e., A3 competition) led to benefit four (i.e., B4 parity) 17 times; similarly, benefit four then led to benefit two (i.e., B2 fun) 11 times. The construction of the implication matrix led the researcher to produce an Attribute–Benefit Model. The Attribute-Benefit Model is a visual representation of the most common relationships between concepts as mentioned by interviewees (Chard et al., 2015). The findings chapter presents the Attribute-Benefit model in greater detail.

Rigour

Trustworthiness. From the perspective of qualitative researchers, the topic of trustworthiness, rigour, and validity have been a contentious issue (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Historically, a lack of rigour and validity has been pointed to as weaknesses for qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result, Lincoln and Guba (1985) derived four criteria that could be applied to qualitative research to ensure that the results that were being presented in studies could be accepted. The four criteria were: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of the criteria and their application to this study are discussed in greater detail below.

Credibility. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), findings are deemed credible if the researcher presents data in an authentic fashion as provided to them by the participants. According to Liamputtong (2009), "credibility is comparable to internal validity" (p. 21). Further, Liamputtong (2009) explains that consistency must exist between the derived data and the researcher's representations of this data through results and conclusions. In an effort to establish credibility for the data collected, member checking was employed. Member checking allows for study participants to authenticate and validate the details of the data that was collected from them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, research participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcript prior to data analysis taking place. It must be noted that only two respondents returned their transcripts requesting changes be made by the researcher prior to data analysis taking place. The remaining 27 respondents failed to return their transcripts or contact the researcher with any concerns about the recorded data. In the case of the one respondent who chose not to be audio recorded they were given the opportunity to review the researcher's field notes upon completion of the interview. Member checking ensured each interviewee's responses were not misinterpreted during transcription and that validation was received.

Transferability. Transferability is the second criterion of trustworthiness and is defined as the extent to which the findings of a particular study can be extended beyond the specific cases involved in the research (Liamputtong, 2009). Ultimately, it is up to the reader to determine whether or not the findings of the study are transferable to other areas of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, it is imperative that research findings are presented by using rich description. Rich description allows the reader to place

themselves in the depicted setting and lived experience, and from this he/she is able to determine the appropriateness of the study's results (Patton, 2002; Tracy, 2013). For this particular study, transferability was achieved by applying rich description to the transcription of interviews and presentation of the findings. Specifically, rich description was achieved by using quotations from respondents to define the attributes and personal benefits that a parent's ideal tournament experience consists of. Furthermore, it has been highlighted that Hockey Canada and its regional governing bodies have established a uniform offering of rep hockey opportunities across the country. Thus, regardless of regional characteristics the expectations and preferences regarding rep hockey opportunities—like tournaments—should remain consistent across the country.

Dependability and confirmability. Respectively, dependability and confirmability are defined as the aspects of trustworthiness that ensures that the findings are indeed constructs of the data collected and that the findings could be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To aid in establishing dependability, detailed field notes were recorded prior to, during, and after each interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Tracy, 2013). Furthermore, this researcher's data analysis and overall presentation of this study was held to a review of a thesis research committee. Specifically, the review of the content codes that have established the basis of the study's findings were thoroughly discussed by the author and thesis research supervisor prior to settling on the 16 that are presented in this document.

Reflexivity. It is encouraged for qualitative researchers to provide a reflexive account of their research process (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Tracy, 2013). More specifically, it is important for researchers to be frank about their strengths and

shortcomings (Tracy, 2013) thus ultimately addressing “what I know” and “how I know it,” (Patton, 2002, p. 64). As suggested by Tracy (2013), detailed field notes were kept throughout data collection and were used in the data analysis to implement reflexivity in the study. Furthermore, the researcher was aware of his experiences with the minor hockey tournament phenomenon and used them to assist in the data collection and analysis phase. Specifically, the researcher’s personal tournament experiences were used to establish a rapport with respondents in order to achieve rich and descriptive interviews. Further, the researcher’s personal tournament experiences were relied on to translate minor hockey nomenclature that some parents used during their interviews and form appropriate content codes that were reflective of the research sample. Lastly, the strengths and limitations of this work will be presented in the following chapters to allow readers to personally assess the relevance and trustworthiness of the research (Tracy, 2013).

Chapter 4 – Findings

In total, 30 rep hockey parents were interviewed using the laddering technique. Of the 30 respondents who participated in the study, 21 were male (70%) and nine were female (30%). The majority of participants indicated that their child was playing rep hockey within the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region in either the peewee minor or peewee major division ($n = 23$, 76.6%). It should be noted that one participant was a parent of a male playing rep hockey in the bantam minor division. Indeed, the demographics of this individual and their child do not match those of the targeted research sample. Despite their demographic characteristics, this particular respondent remained part of the sample due to their notable experience within minor hockey—specifically AAA hockey—and the interest in the study that they showed the researcher. As result of their experiences, this individual was able to contribute valuable, detailed ladders to the data. To the knowledge of the researcher, the inclusion of the parent whose child played bantam minor hockey did not alter or directly impact data analysis. A complete profile of the research participants is presented in Table 4. Appendix E contains a participant specific profile, which includes characteristics such as: pseudonym, sex, coaching position (if any), initiation category, and the season ending rank of their child's team according to MYHockey. MYHockey (2015) is an independently operated online youth hockey organization and tournament operator that mathematically ranks youth hockey teams from various regions and initiation categories across Canada and the U.S. Teams are ranked using a mathematical formula that considers a team's average goal differential and strength of schedule (MYHockey, 2015).

Table 4: Sample Profile (n=30)

SEX	TOTAL
MALE	21
FEMALE	9
MULTIPLE CHILDREN PLAYING REP HOCKEY	
YES	6
NO / DID NOT IDENTIFY	24
LOCAL ASSC. (OHF AFFILIATION)	
Brampton (OMHA)	1
Brantford (ALLIANCE)	1
Burlington (OMHA)	3
Dundas (OMHA)	1
Garden City – St. Catharines (OMHA)	2
Grimsby (OMHA)	3
Lincoln (OMHA)	8
Niagara Falls (OMHA)	5
Niagara North (OMHA)	4
Southern Tier (OMHA)	2
DIVISION (age group)	
ATOM MINOR (age 9)	3
ATOM MAJOR (age 10)	3
PEEWEE MINOR (age 11)	12
PEEWEE MAJOR (age 12)	11
BANTAM MINOR (age 13)	1
CATEGORY	
BB	2
AE	6
A	6
AA	7
AAA	9
COACH	
HEAD COACH	7
ASSISTANT COACH	2
FORMER HEAD COACH	1
ON MULTIPLE COACHING STAFFS	3

- 1 respondent identified their son as playing outside of their home centre due to getting cut from their hometown team.
- 1 respondent was interviewed based on their daughter playing boys' rep hockey (PeeWee Minor).
- 1 respondent was interviewed based on their child playing Bantam Minor AAA.
- All AE or BB category classifications were added to the MAJOR division of the respective ages. AE and BB typically encompass both age groups of a particular division. For example a PeeWee AE team would include both 11 and 12 year old players.

All participants indicated that tournaments are essential supplemental experiences for minor hockey participants. Specifically, all respondents indicated that at least one tournament per season should include a travel/overnight experience for their child's team. This feeling remained consistent with all participants despite the majority of them voicing their concern with the additional financial and time commitment that participating in tournaments adds to the already extensive cost of minor hockey. Specifically, the number of tournaments that participants had attended or planned to attend with their child's team during the 2014-2015 ranged from two to five—this number did not include tournaments that required qualification based on team performance including events like playoff tournaments, provincial championships, and the International Silver Stick Finals. Participants who indicated that they would be attending four or five tournaments during the 2014-2015 season were mainly those parents whose child was enrolled in AAA hockey ($n=9$, 30%). This significant additional commitment to tournaments by the AAA parents who participated in this study is consistent with the enhanced skill development focus associated with AAA hockey—the more games a child can play against a variety of competition the better hockey player they will become (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). Six of the participants indicated they had multiple children participating in rep hockey during the 2014-2015, thus doubling or even tripling their tournament commitments.

As was mentioned in the data analysis section of this document, parents most associated seven attributes and nine benefits with an ideal minor hockey tournament experience. The most commonly associated attributes include: *accommodations*, *competition*, *cost*, *entertainment options*, *experiential influencers*, *tournament operations*, and *travel requirements*. The most commonly perceived benefits from the

aforementioned attributes included: *bonding*, *emotive links*, *fun*, *life lessons*, *limit stress*, *parity*, *value*, *skill development*, and *time management*. The most associated attribute with an ideal tournament experience was *tournament operations* ($n=27$). Additionally, the most perceived benefits were *bonding* ($n=25$) and *value* ($n=25$). The implication matrix presented in the previous chapter was used to identify the existing interrelationships amongst all the identified coded concepts. All of the attributes, benefits, and their perceived linkages are visually presented in Figure 4.

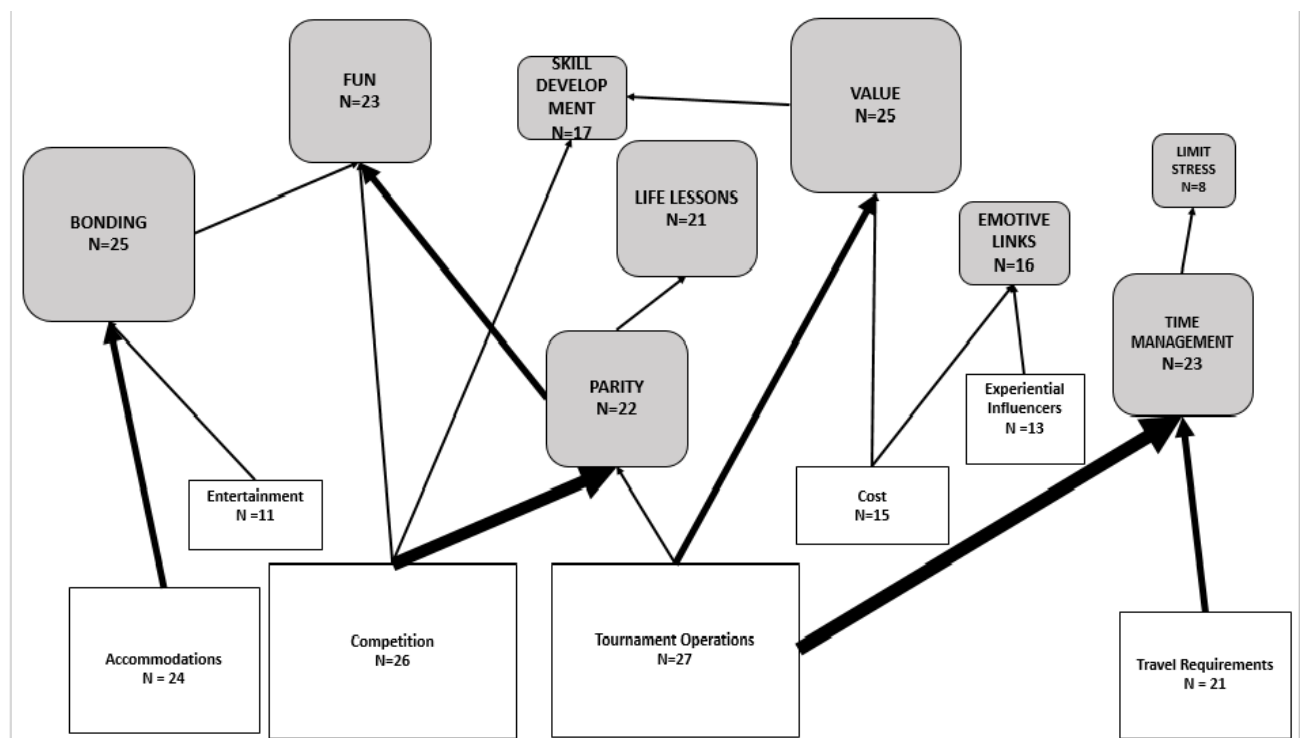


Figure 4: Attribute – Benefit Model

In this particular model, the white boxes represent the attributes and grey boxes represent the benefits. The size of each box is reflective of the number of different respondents that mentioned each concept. The thickness of the arrows represents the number of respondents that connected each concept in a ladder. In order to ensure clarity and reduce clutter, a cut-off variable (Goldenberg et al., 2000; Klenosky et al., 1993) of

five was selected. This means that all of the relationships represented on the Attribute-Benefit Model had to be mentioned by at least five different respondents. This approach for representing data is consistent with Chard and colleagues' (2015) presentation of an Attribute-Benefit Model regarding parents' perception of youth rep hockey participation.

Attributes & Benefits

Tournament operations. *Tournament operations* was most often voiced by parents as a catch-all response to the initial question: "*Can you please describe your idea of an ideal tournament experience from your perspective as a parent?*" Specifically, the parents who were interviewed for this particular study consider *tournament operations* to include the following elements: their child's team plays at least four guaranteed games, having an accommodating schedule, the tournament logistical features (rules, result, and statistics) were clearly stated and available for all to see, and the quality of on-ice officials. The following discussion will further describe each element of *tournament operations* with excerpts from the interviews that were collected.

Four guaranteed games. Parents were particularly concerned with ensuring that their child's team was guaranteed at least four games upon entering the tournament. Respondent Andrew explained, "I wouldn't consider anything with less than four games [guaranteed]...you might as well maximize the number of games that you get to play. To assume you are going to get to a finals or semi-finals—I wouldn't say that's a wise assumption."

Accommodating schedule. Parents often followed their four game minimum sentiment with how game times should be scheduled. Specifically, parents like Greg, would like to see the distance travelled by a team factored into the development of their

schedule. Greg said, “I know you can’t meet everyone’s request, but the farther away you are travelling the later the draw you should get.” Furthermore, parents were also particularly concerned about the scheduling of games too close together. Here, Kari noted, “the time in between [games] is important or they should be appropriate for the child’s age.” Kevin echoed Kari’s sentiment when he discussed his 10 year-old son’s team, “there is not a lot of stamina [to play] a game at 1pm and a game at 3pm.” Adriano summed up a parent’s perspective on an accommodating schedule when he said “...you don’t want to be playing the first game of the day and the last game of the day. You want to have a balance so you play then you have some time then you play again then you want to have the rest of your day.”

Tournament structure/logistics. Parents often cited the clarity of the rules and processes in which teams were advanced to quarter-final, semi-final, or championship games as a key factor to a positive tournament experience. Kevin explained the importance of clarity in rules and processes for advancing teams:

...the rules have to be fair. You know you can’t have inconsistencies in rules and rules that don’t make sense –it’s the details but it’s the details that matter right? I don’t have the exact wording in my mind but you know I have been at a tournament where [my team] hadn’t lost a game [in round robin play] and [we] didn’t advance.

Furthermore, the clarity and distribution of tournament information was also deemed to include up to date and readily available statistics and results of the ongoing tournament play. Respondent Adriano noted:

You know, if it has the website or in-arena result boards, if it has the standings of who is going where—you have to be able to know [where you stand] especially if you are playing on Sunday. And from a kid perspective, they want to know how they are doing and what they need to do in order to [advance].

Referees. Similar to tournament organizers referees, can also have a significant impact on tournament experiences and parents' overall opinion of a tournament. Bryan noted a specific example when the assignment of referees negatively impacted a recent tournament experience he had: "I understood from talking to some of the officials that they had problems getting referees because it was so early in year and with the number of teams playing—so you had guys refereeing divisions that you wouldn't normally see, so that took away from some of the experience." Furthermore, Hilary summed the importance of having quality referees as part of a tournament when she mentioned, "The better the refs the better the handle they have on stuff and it creates less drama."

In summary, the key actors (referees), the quality of the communication channel between organizers and participating teams, as well as the structure of competition can ultimately determine whether a parent perceives their tournament experience as positive or negative. By effectively looking after and implementing each of the elements that make up the *tournament operations* a tournament can be perceived as a positive experience regardless of who wins or losses on the ice.

Time management. The perception of *tournament operations* was often voiced as a precursor to the benefit of *time management*. As indicated by the Attribute-Benefit Model, the linkage between *tournament operations* and *time management* was mentioned most frequently by respondents ($n=20$). *Time management* was expressed as a twofold

concept. The majority of respondents perceived *time management* in relation to their ability to accomplish their daily responsibilities as a parent and employee. For example, Harvey said:

I guess one of the things that bothers me about that particular tournament is that they had to be pulled out of school on the Thursday and the Friday. You typically expect to miss the Friday but to miss two days for the sake of a tournament or hockey really is a bit of an extreme measure...Some people have to book holiday time or what have you or find help to get your child to the Thursday game or babysit your other kids which is what I had to do.

Harvey's response offers insight into the priorities that parents must balance in order to allow their child to play rep hockey. Keaton echoed this sentiment, "Hockey parents tend to be very committed whether it is early [morning] practices or [excessive] travel...so hockey parents tend to go through a lot of trouble to ensure that their children are participating in the sport." Considering both Harvey and Keaton's responses, tournament organizers that consider the priorities of hockey parents and do not take advantage of these unique individuals' commitment to the sport will likely be considered in high regard by attendees.

The second facet of *time management* was as the "availability and use of downtime." This was often mentioned in direct relation to the accommodating scheduling element of *tournament operations*. As Adriano explains, "...if you have a block [of free]time you can organize to go somewhere like the movie theatre, or a baseball game depending on the weather, go bowling – and just do some team functions." Adriano's comments indicate that on top of balancing the priorities mentioned by Harvey and

Keaton, tournaments (especially out of town tournaments) are about building experiences beyond the games being played. Bearing in mind the comments of Keaton, Adriano, and Harvey, and the overall significance of the linkage between *tournament operations and time management*, accommodating the two facets of *time management* in which hockey parents find important can greatly enhance the perception of a tournament.

Limit stress. For a portion of respondents, *time management* was voiced as a precursor to limiting stress. When discussing a tournament experience in Detroit, Greg provided insight on the stress that hockey parents can face when travelling to a tournament and where the previously mentioned aspects of time management are not accounted for. Greg said:

...we had an 8:15am draw on a Friday morning—talk about the short end of the stick. You are leaving late on Thursday, you have to get the kids to bed, and then wake up early, so once again it is extra stress and strain put on the families.

Meaghan echoed Greg's concerns, "You don't want be stressed out trying to find arenas. [Based on schedules, it's] hard enough to get there sometimes already." The parents who mentioned *limiting stress* spoke highly of tournaments whose operations eased travel concerns, thus allowing for thorough enjoyment of the event. An example of this sentiment was shared by Greg when he said, "You know, you don't want it to become a whole stressful thing—you want it—it's supposed to be fun."

It is worth noting that two of the eight respondents who mentioned *limit stress* used it in the sense of limiting parents acting out in the stands at tournaments. For example, Derek explained the importance of rule clarity and communication from tournament organizers as a limiter of stress. Specifically, Derek said, "It alleviates a lot of

the stress and pressure of having a coach email you everything and it prevents people in the stands from getting excited [or acting out] about rules that are not there.”

Travel requirements. Similar to the *tournament operations* attribute, *travel requirements* were often articulated as a precursor to *time management*. The most common perception of travel requirements that was mentioned involved the distance between home and the tournament hosting community. For example, Andrew noted, “...I don’t think it is necessary to travel all that far. I would say three hours maximum [is a decent distance to travel].” Additionally, when discussing *travel requirements*, parent-coaches, like Bryan, took into consideration the already large amount of travel Greater Golden Horseshoe Region rep hockey parents undertake during a season. Bryan said:

So I am asking families to go to an away game during the week and drive one or two hours. I don’t want to automatically assume that’s what everyone wants to do for a tournament. So distance—I mean there are nice tournaments in Chicago and Florida but are they realistic?

Some parents expanded on the perception of travel requirements to include the distance between hosting arenas, accommodations, restaurants, and sightseeing attractions. Greg explained, “The main thing is that you want the hotel to be close to the rinks...The maximum you want to drive is 10 to 15 minutes but I know that that is not always possible, but if it is possible, that is something [organizers] should look into making that happen.” Quinn further explained the importance of having tournament facilities and local entertainment options in close proximity to each other by noting, “...enjoying the city includes the restaurants, hotel, and the general area. Having the hotel close to the arena and restaurants close by helps [with that].

Of interest, parents often articulated the time of year a tournament takes place as a significant factor of travel requirements. For example, Keaton said, "...tournaments over Christmas break... everyone is so busy and if you throw in a tournament in there, even locally, it is just too much." Also, Ryan noted, "I know we also venture into the U.S. sometimes and we pick a tournament around Black Friday—a huge shopping event. So the mothers, well mostly the mothers go crazy." In this case, Ryan's comments explain how travelling during a certain time of year can be beneficial or a selling feature to parents.

Value. Second to *time management*, *value* was the most commonly linked benefit to *tournament operations*. Due to the significant monetary commitment that is required to participate in rep hockey, parents were particularly concerned with ensuring that their money and the team's fundraising efforts consistently produced quality hockey experiences for their child. For example, Debra stated, "Value for money—so quality service, maximum playing time, affordable accommodation." Ryan was more specific when discussing *value*:

So I like to see a four game minimum—you know a three game round robin and quarter-final, semi-final, or and final. I think parents will look at that as better bang for their buck. Tournaments are expensive and they range anywhere from \$1,100 to \$1,400 [per team]. So I think breaking it down for cost per hour of ice to get the best value is to get the most games out of the weekend.

Most respondents who spoke about *value* similarly acknowledged that the amount of ice time that their child's team will receive over the course of a tournament is a significant factor in justifying a tournament destination selection. Sam, a parent of a goalie, added an interesting perspective on the link between ice time and *value*. Sam said:

When you only get three games guaranteed you may travel to Orillia or the U.S. and your kid may only see one game [because coaches alternate starting goalies]. So you are spending hundreds of dollars for your kid to see twenty minutes of ice time and then he is done for the weekend.

Interestingly, parent-coaches regularly voiced their concern with justifying additional expenditures—like tournaments—to parents. Therefore, entering tournaments that provide the greatest return in terms of skill development for the youth and limited additional expenditure required by the parents was of the utmost importance to each of these individuals. Bryan best articulated a coach's responsibility when it comes to tournament selection: "...to go to tournaments, it's an added expense. To justify it whether it is through fundraising or just asking for the extra funding from a family—me as a coach I *always* have to be cost conscience for the families." Furthermore, Julian added, "So you set out your budget at the beginning of the year that [the coaches] and the parents feel can meet [team] expectations...you have to stick to that budget and there are a lot of costs associated with that."

In sum, regardless of the tournament experience offered by event organizers, it is the coaches of each participating team that have the most significant impact on one's *value*. Coaches directly influence the ice time of their team members and they traditionally have the power to select tournament destinations as well as team budget expenditures. All of these factors are directly associated with a parent gaining a positive *value* on their tournament experience investment.

Cost. In general, *cost* was used as a preface to *value*. Additionally, respondents also regularly linked *cost* with the benefit of *emotive links*. Debra provided the most detail when describing what exactly tournament costs mean to a parent:

...resources are just so scarce and hockey costs so much money. Like, we have reached a point with our sons and hockey that affordability is becoming an issue and there is only so many tournaments that you can afford...it costs a lot to go to a tournament when you consider the team's fee, which we as parents fundraise to pay. Plus, you are driving there which is a cost, you have to stay there which is a cost, you have to pay for food while we're there which is a cost...

The sentiments of the required costs for a child to play rep hockey and the additional expenditures that tournament participation puts on a parent has been stressed in multiple sections of this manuscript. Similar to Debra, those who chose to discuss *cost* regularly identified team entry fee, dining fees, and travel fees as key components to their evaluation of a tournament's cost.

It is worth noting, a small portion of respondents mentioned additional costs incurred by tournament-going parents that were not covered by Debra's description: gate fee entry for games and hotel group booking fees. Specifically, Kari said:

I'm driving him there and doing all this running around and I have pay \$20 to watch him play for the weekend—it is just an irritant. And then you got to make sure to keep your stamp on your hand because you have to go to the next arena to show that you paid—it's just little things that [should be avoided]. I wouldn't mind paying an extra fee for my son maybe an extra \$5 or \$10 per kid to have them

play in the tournament rather than have them charge myself or parents or friend or anyone who wants to watch their child play for the weekend.

Further, with reference to group booking fees, Quinn explained:

Other parts off the ice would be a tournament that doesn't paint you into a corner where you have to use their accommodation options and pay through a third party where the price of the accommodation is jacked up because the organizing group or association takes a cut and the booking agency takes a cut.

Emotive links. Considering the time and financial commitment required to be a rep hockey parent it is of no surprise that some respondents viewed certain emotional responses as a key benefit of a tournament experience. A significant part of feeling appreciated that was voiced by respondents was tournament organizers preventing parents from feeling like they were getting price gouged. Hilary said:

I appreciate that minor hockey organizations try to generate revenue by hosting tournaments but if you are going to do it do you have let second and third parties make money off it too? ...there is a lot of money being made by crooks [or certain organizations] are lining people's pockets.

Debra, sharing Hilary's sentiment, added:

Youth sport is about providing services and programs for youths to participate in a sport. It is not meant for companies and entrepreneurs to make a profit. Not every team is going to win the tournament so how else do you feel appreciated for going? So how else do you feel that satisfaction for spending your money there? Well to me it is the other things that you get because ultimately only two teams are going to get to the final. So what are the other experiences that you can give

the youth that I can sit back and see my child enjoying himself at the tournament that isn't just on the ice. Three and out is a pretty boring experience and pretty disappointing.

Hilary and Debra's comments refer to the rise of commercialization and privatization within the tournament industry. As a result, a significant portion of the economic gains from such events fail to be redistributed within the host community or local minor hockey organizations. Many parents similarly acknowledged Hilary and Debra's points of view and added that by providing something tangible for each participant to take home from the tournament goes a long way in preventing parents from feeling like they were price gouged. For example, when discussing the need for tournaments to include awards for every game Quinn said:

I just feel that it brings more class to the tournament. To me that stuff is about the kids and [organizers] show that they care. And it gives the kids an incentive to play well because they all want to get that award.

Similarly, Meaghan said, "Not everybody wins so they should have something. They always like little treats even if it is something small like a Gatorade. And you know it makes it more fun for them." In sum, Katelyn and Michelle both similarly voiced that proper management of these *emotive links* for parents are essential for establishing trust and comfort with tournament organizers and creating an intention to return.

Experiential influencers. The emotional benefits that parents feel at hockey tournaments, in some cases, can be directly linked to tournament touch points or *experiential influencers*. Specifically, parents generally referred to customer service and the aesthetic appeal of the host facility as key experiential influencers. The majority of

respondents who discussed *experiential influencers* noted that the tournament experience significantly relies on those charged with the task of servicing attendees and acting as the overall face(s) of the tournament (i.e., tournament organizers, vendors, hotel staff, restaurant staff, etc.). Respondent Kevin outlined this sentiment in his description of the ideal tournament operator:

You are there to serve people coming in. You are not there just to make the money from the event; you have to be considerate. You have to consider the person you have fronting the tournament, they can't be a miserable person. I have had that where you go and talk to the [organizer] because [the tiebreaker rules] or how they want to rank teams is confusing and the person won't give you the time of day because they are overwhelmed.

With regards, to hosting arenas Sam explained:

I mean you don't have to have a state of the art facility but you have to have one where you can enjoy watching the games and the kids that are in the game can enjoy it too and are not going to get hurt. Some of these ice surfaces, boards, glass, and even the nets if they aren't looked after or maintained properly, someone will get hurt and it's no fun for a parent to watch the games. Sometimes it's nice to have an arena that has a bar so you can go have a beer [laughs] while the kids are getting ready. It's also more fun—the atmosphere in the arena makes it more fun. If you are standing there freezing you can't even cheer. If you are sitting in a nice arena where all the parents are sitting together cheering on the team it's more fun—it leads to the atmosphere of the game.

In addition to Sam's comments, Mary-Jo mentioned that a tournament atmosphere can be aided by having, "vendors available associated with the event." Katelyn and Joshua similarly stated, "the overall prestige of the tournament" is a significant to attendees because it aids in establishing a more enjoyable atmosphere for attendees. Mikayla and Keaton shared the sentiment that, "multi-purpose facilities that offer activities to occupy children not playing" in the tournament are welcomed by any parent.

In summary, *experiential influencers* very much dictate the perceptions all stakeholders formulate for the tournament. Tyler best articulated the influence that the arena, organizers, and hotel have on all stakeholders tournament experience:

So part of your family have travelled with you or others have come to watch you want it to be a good experience for not just the kids on the ice but everyone who is there. You may have grandparents there younger kids there and you want it to be comfortable for everybody. We don't want them to remember that we played in an old rickety barn and froze our butts off. So you know if they are going to host something you hope the community has the proper venues to do it and is not just bringing our cash into the community where we are forced to stay at a not so great hotel and play at a not so great arena.

Competition. *Competition* was the second most commonly mentioned attribute discussed by the interviewed hockey parents. Respondent Katelyn summed up the important aspect of *competition* by noting:

I think in our particular case our team is doing pretty well (team was undefeated at time of the interview) in the Niagara District. We have played these teams over and over again and tournaments give you a chance to play teams that have a

different style of play so you can—it can challenge you playing teams that don't know you and you don't know them.

Katelyn's comments highlight that parents prefer to see the teams in a tournament be of an equal caliber and from a variety of geographic regions. In relation to equal caliber teams, Keaton noted, "...the competition has to be fairly balanced. In other words when it is advertised as a certain level (initiation category) it needs to have teams that meet that level..." Further, Andrew said, "It's nice to have a healthy competitive environment, but you cannot have organizers trying to fill the docket and the teams they let in are either not [the advertised] caliber of play or they are older than you...it's not fair." Michelle highlighted the importance of competing against a variety of teams from different regions by saying, "...you just like to see a variety of competition... you just like to see how your team does against different teams in the different regions."

In addition, the parent-coaches who were interviewed frequently noted that when considering tournament competition they have to evaluate what the purpose of the tournament is and what the team is capable of. Debra, a former AAA coach, explained:

One of the big things I decided to consider when I chose tournaments was competitive balance, competition level, and opportunities to at least win some games. So a lot of it is we went to the States, you know over the border part of it was because of our location but you could go over the border and play in what they called a AAA level division but the AAA over there was a little weaker so it was even for us. The kids do not know the difference! They do not know the difference and they could care less! And we won a couple, we made it to the final

in one. So a lot of it is competitive level but the other is how you approach the tournament—what’s the purpose of it.

Julian echoed Debra’s sentiments when he discussed the reasons behind the tournament selections for his team. Julian said, “So me being a new AAA coach and this being a full revamp year for this team so my role was to stay out of Toronto this year—stay a little closer and at places where [the team] could be successful.”

Parity. The attribute of *competition* most commonly led to parents discussing the benefit of *parity*. Specifically, parents often used the term fairness to describe parity or emphasis that the best tournaments have a limited number of blowout games. For example, Alex said:

I want a fair playing field. So the teams all come from the same division or same sort of status so it’s not one team dominating the others. The best tournaments are the ones that go into and it’s competitive and you have to earn that championship or consolation championship or whatever it is [the teams are playing for].

Kyle noted, “...we just had a recent tournament where every team that played this one team won 10-0, 12-0. You are paying to see your kid compete not slaughter someone, right?”

Some interviewees extended their discussion of parity to include details about its important impact on their children playing and their own personal feelings. For example, Mary-Jo discussed the importance of parity limiting frustration for a team during a tournament:

[Parity] allows the kids to carry themselves through the whole weekend. If they are getting slaughtered—if they aren’t getting slaughtered and have to play late

then play early the next morning they want to get up and do it because they know they are going to possibly win something opposed to getting their asses kicked. Mikayla's comments expand on Mary-Jo and Kyle's sentiments to provide insight on parents' attitudes while watching tournament games. Mikayla noted, "Well it breaks my heart to see them [blown out]...kids are way more resilient [following a blowout loss]. I think it bothers me more probably."

Furthermore, the concept of fairness can be extended to describe the linkage between *tournament operations* and *parity*. As Debra explained, "[It's nice to see an] appreciation for fairness in terms of a break in between games. Normal expectations would be that you play an hour in one community you won't make 2.5 hours later to another one—it is unreasonable." Sam echoed Debra's sentiments, "...it's game times too, I wouldn't want to have a game [end] at 1:30 then have to be at another arena by 3:30 - it's not fair to the kids they can't compete at that level." Considering both of the attributes (*competition* and *tournament operations*) that have the strongest linkage with *parity*, it can be defined as *competition* that results in limited large margin wins and teams playing a fair schedule.

Life lessons. *Parity* was often articulated as a precursor to the benefit of *life lessons*. For example, Harvey said, "[Equal] competition pushes you in life when you think about. There is life lessons to be learned when you have been pushed so it is transferable in that sense as well." Grant had similar perspective:

I'm talking about life in general—why is [equal] competition important? Because it pushes them to that next level. Not just in hockey but in life—he understands from

the hockey experience that results just won't happen you have to work hard to get everything and that is important.

Andrew acknowledged the importance of having his child challenged by equal and fair competition while also adding, "...it's a character builder. You have to learn to win gracefully and lose gracefully. You have to learn to look for the positives and the negatives and I think at this level winning should not be your paramount expectation." Additionally, Joshua considered tournaments as an excellent tool to teach the young athletes about goal setting. Specifically, Joshua said, "...a team goal this year is to win a tournament. So if I put them in a tournament that they know they can't compete in, I am setting an unrealistic goal for them. Setting a goal and achieving it, what's a better example than that?" In sum, Kyle said, "you can only teach your kid so much and the other part of it is basically world lessons like being part of a team and working with others—that is stuff you can't teach your kid that is stuff that is learned outside your home life." This sense that each of their respective children have developed into more well-rounded individuals due to tournament experiences and their overall participation in rep hockey was prevalent in many of the interviewees.

Skill development. Parents, in particular parent-coaches, also saw *competition* as a common preface to the benefit of aiding their child's hockey *skill development*. Kevin acknowledged, "Well the reason why I put my kids in hockey is so they learn how to excel at something." From a coaching perspective, Julian added, "Our budget is just shy of \$20,000 and that includes a lot of skill development like the tournaments and goaltending clinics." Marty furthered the sentiment of having a skill development focus by saying: "...from our perspective we're going or we're looking at the season as an

opportunity for our kids to progress and develop.” Considering Julian and Marty’s comments, tournaments are clearly a key facet of progressing a team’s development over the course a season. In order to achieve *skill development* goals parent-coaches who were interviewed often characterized tournament competition as prominent evaluation tools. For example, Bryan discussed the importance of participating in a season opening (early bird) tournament:

It was nice because it was early enough in the year and it was the first time for the team to hit the ice and play a meaningful game. So from a coach’s perspective it gave us a baseline to see where we were at before we got into our season.

Similarly, Marty said, “...we want kids in close games [against a variety of competition] because that is when you expose your weaknesses as a team and see the things that you need to work on as a coach.” From a non-coaching perspective, parents like Greg, noted that tournaments are key because they offer kids the opportunity, “...to play as many games as possible so they have the greatest opportunity to show their talents.”

Accommodations. Parents regularly voiced their opinion that when at a tournament, the experiences that take place away from the arena are just as important as those that happen on the ice. As a result, hotel or *accommodations* ($n=24$) have a significant impact on tournament experience. Like all services, a hotel’s brand is a significant indicator of the quality of accommodations and service one will receive throughout their stay. However, as many respondents noted, when travelling with a team to a tournament a lack of consistency exists when expectations regarding the hotel of choice are compared to the actual accommodation experience. To no fault of the tournament organizers, hotels which fail to meet the expectations of parents can

substantially influence the overall perception of the tournament. Tyler described the implications a hotel has on the overall tournament experience:

...the hotel had a million rules—they didn't want anyone doing anything, they called the police, meanwhile they filled the hotel with teams but didn't want any of them to be there. Now the venues and people at the tournament were great but the hotel they picked was bad and what do we end remembering about the tournament? The hotel.

The majority of parents who spoke about *accommodations* acknowledged that they prefer hotels that provide teams with a conference room that they can use for team functions and are comfortable with team members playing mini sticks or other games in the hotel. Mini sticks refers to a game of hockey played in a small space (i.e., hotel hallway or boardroom) using miniature plastic sticks, nets, and a ball. Marty described:

...this weekend we are going to a tournament in Rochester and the hotel that we stay at has this big conference room that they close down for the weekend and they actually put boards around it with mini stick nets and they have a staff person monitor it all of the time. So they run full mini-stick games and everyone wants to go to that hotel and everyone's experience whether they go 0-4 and 4-0 is fantastic because of something so stupid as a mini-sticks room. Compared to other tournaments that you go to and the hotels are shutting the kids down from running and I get you want to care for the facilities—that's not my problem—and I totally agree with that but certain tournaments are doing things to cater to the hockey crowd and if you can find a partnership with hotels that would be creative in doing stuff like that it makes the experience fantastic.

Additionally, respondents were fond of hotels that offered an indoor pool. For example, Quinn said:

So hockey is played in the winter so when you go away you want to make sure that you have a hotel that has an indoor pool because that is a big thing that allows the kids to get together. And then the parents can order food or hang by the pool and socialize and that is where bonding happens as well.

In summary, hockey parents are clearly looking for specific level of care or attention from hotel staff when they travel to out-of-town tournaments. As Alex stated, "...the hotel knows our team is coming and they take care of us."

Entertainment options. Similar to *accommodations*, *entertainment options* were a common preface to the benefit of *bonding*. What a community offers in terms of easily accessible attractions to do during time away from the competition of the tournament is seen as a significant selling feature for parents and coaches. For example, Tyler explained:

We travelled to Lake Placid (host of the 1980 Winter Olympic Games) and we got to see where they did bobsledding, we got to see a little bit of history, um it was a pretty cool town you know you could tell your kids a little story about where you were or what took place there and you got to share that memory with them. So it is kind of neat to go to these places—well that is part of what draws us go to it but it makes that story part of the experience—you know like you bought the t-shirt sort of thing.

Respondents who discussed *entertainment options* did acknowledge that not all communities can offer high profile attractions, like Olympic Games host sites, to bring

teams into their communities. Due to the significant amount of time and effort that families dedicate to a youth playing rep hockey, parents voiced their appreciation for those tournaments that were able to offer additional unique experiences away from the competition in the arena. Grant explained this sentiment the best when he said: "...many of these trips become your vacations almost because they are so expensive. Since you are spending so much money you would like to make sure there is something in it for yourself too. It's not just about the kids." Bryan added, "We sometimes pick tournaments to go to around American Thanksgiving because the whole Black Friday shopping thing is appealing to a whole family." Together, Grant and Bryan highlighted the importance of finding tournaments that offer something for an entire family to take part in because a tournament experience is not just defined by what happens on the ice. Once again, parents like Marty, considered off-ice activities at tournaments as having the most significant impact to a tournament experience. Marty said, "I know one time we were in Peterborough, our hotel was on the water, and we went fishing in between games. It was fantastic and that is the stuff that you are going to remember."

Bonding. *Bonding* and its importance to the tournament experience was thoroughly described by Greg and his following comments:

...giving the kids an opportunity to bond is a big one. It is not necessarily the distance (travelled) but the time together because for me it's about the kids having fun. Maybe I don't know what your study will show but it is not about the kids going to the NHL; it's about the kids having fun and then becoming an old fart like me and they can still lace'em up and go out and enjoy the game. That is my mantra—that's my biggest key—giving the kids the opportunity to have some time

together, and to be honest it is about the parents too. An opportunity for parents to get to know one another, develop friendships, break bread together that is my thing.

Greg's comments highlight that tournaments are not only important for the social life of youth participants but the parents accompanying them. Mary-Jo echoed the importance of *bonding* at tournaments for parents: "...you need to get to know the new parents and you have your regular group cliques who have been together a while [but tournaments] open it up for everyone." Referring to the benefits of *bonding* with other parents Marty said, "...my parents are 70 [and] some of their best friends are from hockey; my buddies' parents. And its--there is something really cool about that. You know we spend a lot of time doing this so that relational side is vital." Considering comments above, a tournament's perception can be enhanced by organizers ensuring that opportunities exist for parents *and* teammates to bond.

Beyond adding to their social life, some parents discussed bonding at tournaments as a significant contributor to improving team play thus making games more enjoyable to watch. Specifically, Michelle said "we have talked about this [with the boys] that a team that gels well and gets along well tends to play better." Similarly, Nicole added, "...[tournament activities] builds their trust in each other and they learn to trust each other on the ice. So they know who they are looking for – they get to know each other better."

Fun. Respondents commonly used *fun* as a benefit to complete ladders. As a result, *fun* is the concept with the most linkages displayed on the Attribute-Benefit Model. Specifically, *fun* was linked to *bonding*, *parity*, and *competition*—the linkage

between *fun* and *parity* ($n=11$) was the most mentioned of the three. Parents often described their enjoyment in watching their child play when linking *fun* with *parity*. For example, Mikayla said, "...you know it's fun to see them play when there's a possibility or hope of winning." Michelle also linked *parity* with *fun* by saying: "It just wouldn't be enjoyable if we went to these things and were winning 13-2 all the time. You like to see well matched teams and high energy games." Many parents echoed Mikayla and Michelle's sentiments that, win or lose, the closer that the games are the more fun parents have watching tournament competition.

In addition to watching competitive games, respondents also acknowledged that they simply enjoyed watching games against teams that they were unfamiliar with. Parent coaches also regularly voiced their pleasure when given the opportunity to coach against new competition. For example, Bryan voiced his enthusiasm when discussing the opportunity his team had to play against the Toronto Young Nationals—an elite GTHL team—in a tournament. Bryan said, "Personally, I think it adds to the fun and excitement [of the tournament]. I hope it's the same for other members of the team." Alex acknowledged that it's *fun* to play teams from a variety of leagues but also added, "...for kids to have fun at this age, it needs to be competitive. I've been on both sides, we've been at tournaments where we've kicked everyone's rear end and we've been at tournaments where we've been beat up by everybody up—neither experience was fun." Alex's comment highlights the linkage between *competition*, *parity*, and *fun*. More specifically, a parent's enjoyment of a tournament is directly related to the *fun* their child is having on the ice. If *fun* is not being had on the ice by the participants, limited *fun* will be had in the stands regardless of other opportunities that the event provides. Debra

emphasized this point when she said: “Quite frankly, when we go to a hockey tournament it is not about seeing the town, [it’s about what’s happening on the ice].”

It is important to note that some respondents contradicted Debra’s comments because they believed that *fun* at hockey tournaments is not strictly reliant on what happens at the arena. Specifically, those who used *bonding* as a preface to *fun* implied that tournament enjoyment is mainly generated with what takes place away from the arena. Adriano best described the link between *bonding* and *fun*:

You know at the end of the day when it is all said and done, you know 15-20 years from now, that is stuff you are going to remember instead of who won this game and that game. Instead, it is the stuff in between—you have time to go to the hotel in between and do some fun stuff.

This mantra of bonding experiences being more prominent to the overall enjoyment of a tournament than the results on the ice for the parents and the young athletes was shared by all who linked bonding and fun together.

Chapter Five – Discussion, Limitations, Future Research & Conclusion

Discussion of Findings

Effective brand management is often linked to fostering a relationship with consumers through positive customer experiences (Keller, 1993). In order for a positive relationship to be established with a consumer, it is essential that a brand—specifically its points of interaction with the consumer—is reflective of the characteristics that a consumer associates with an ideal experience when using the product or service under consideration (Keller, 1993). Therefore, brands offer significant insight to understanding consumers' motivations, which can be used to assist managers when positioning a brand. Identifying all of the points of contact between a brand and consumers as well as utilizing each contact point to assist in establishing a relationship with the consumers is considered to be the first step in improving brand management (George, 2003; Hollis, 2008).

For a minor hockey tournament organizer, understanding the parental perceptions of an ideal tournament experience is important for the success of a tournament. Specifically, a tournament organizer must be aware of the attributes and benefits that formulate the parental associations of their tournament's brand. Here, initial team recruitment and intention to return could be contingent upon these perceptions. Thus, the purpose of the study was to identify the characteristics of an ideal tournament experience from the perspective of hockey parents. Furthermore, the findings were to be used to form recommendations to improve the branding strategies implemented by tournament organizers. The study began by posing three research questions:

- I. When thinking of a preferred tournament to attend, what are important attributes of the tournament that influence hockey parents to consider it more favourably than other tournament offerings?
- II. When thinking of a preferred tournament to attend, what are important personal benefits of attending the tournament that influence hockey parents to consider a particular tournament more favourably than other tournament offerings?
- III. How do the attributes and benefits relate to one another?

The findings of the current study support that brand associations have a significant role in establishing one's perception of an ideal interaction with a brand. Further, use of the laddering interview technique to link attributes with particular benefits supports Davis' (2002) suggestion that brands are differentiated by consumers based on their attributes being translated into a high order of perceived benefits. As the current study explained, hockey parents consider a variety of linked attributes and benefits of going to a particular tournament in order to establish their perception of the event. This behaviour supports applying expectancy-values theories of behaviour to investigate decisions involving youth sport participation. Here, the parents' behaviour is directed by their goals, which are ultimately influenced by personal interests, parental responsibilities, and their child's interests. Therefore, opportunities that positively impact each of the influencing factors of a parent's life will be thought of favourably. For example, parent respondents' seemed to favour tournaments that allowed them to attain benefits in the form of *value*, *bonding*, *fun*, *time management* (leading to *limited stress*), *parity* (leading to bestowing *life lessons* onto their child), *skill development*, and *emotive*

links (i.e., trust and appreciation). Additionally, benefits in the form of *skill development* and learning *life lessons* are consistent with the findings of Chard et al. (2015) that explored the reasons why parents enroll their child in rep hockey in the first place. Tournaments are an extension of rep hockey participation and it is logical that the benefits that parents seek to obtain would remain consistent through each aspect of the rep hockey experience.

One of the most prominent sentiments amongst respondents was that the *value* from the spending required to attend tournaments had to be positive. As discussed in chapter four, respondents commonly associated *value* to the *skill development* (i.e., amount of ice time) opportunities their child's team received from a tournament and appropriate spending of the team's funds. Essentially, *value* can be linked to the overall level of satisfaction a parent feels was delivered by a tournament. Given that tournaments are considered service brands, they represent a promise of future satisfaction for consumers (Berry, 2002). Further, (Berry, 2002) noted that the success of a service brand is ultimately determined by the quality of service and level of trust the brand establishes with its consumers. As the current study highlights, there are seven attributes and nine benefits that define a quality tournament experience. With respect to establishing *value*, parents often considered *tournament operations* (number of games played, accommodating schedule, referees, and logistics) and *cost* as direct links. Thus, tournament organizers must be aware of the importance of delivering a positive *value* to parents and manage the brand touch-points that directly influence the aforementioned brand attributes accordingly. As the affluent nature of hockey parents shows, most are willing to pay for a quality hockey experience; however, similar to other service brands,

if a tournament fails to deliver the desired level of satisfaction, organizers will see the parents' business taken elsewhere.

Similar to *value*, *bonding* was also considered a prominent sentiment when discussing an ideal tournament experience. Interestingly, Chard et al. (2015) found that parents considered rep hockey as a vehicle for their child to use to establish friendships. The current study expands on the previous findings by suggesting that rep hockey and the associated tournament experiences are indeed a vehicle for friendship that both parents and children can use. Based on this finding it is imperative that tournament organizers provide tournament participants the time and opportunities for *bonding* activities to take place. Research on socialization within youth has typically focused on parent to child socialization (e.g., Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Green & Chalip, 1997) or the reciprocal how a child in sport socializes their parent (e.g., Dorsch, Smith & McDonough, 2009; Hasbrook, 1986; Snyder & Purdy, 1982). Limited research exists however that has explored the relationships that are developed between parents through youth sport. A suggestion for future research is to investigate how prominent the potential of meeting and establishing friendships with new parents is to rep sport participation decisions. Further, a future study could investigate the impact of parent to parent relationships on rep sport decisions, like tournament selection.

According to the respondents of the current study, *bonding* and *value* may be the most prominent benefits associated with an ideal tournament experience; however, this does not limit the importance of the other findings. As Keller (1993) and Davis (2002) noted, the elements of brand associations are not independent; their perception is ultimately determined when a consumer considers all of the elements together. Further,

the delivery of a service—especially a sporting event—is experienced differently by all stakeholders, which causes the level of quality associated with a service brand to vary (Harrison- Hill & Chalip, 2005). Therefore, the perception of an ideal tournament experience will vary according to the demographic characteristics of a parent.

Considering the respondents of this investigation, tournament organizers must be aware of the influence that the initiation category and coaching position (if applicable) has on a parent's perception of a tournament. Specifically, the perception of an ideal tournament for parents of children playing AAA hockey was deemed to be significantly impacted by the events that took place on the ice or at the arena. Respondents who were parents of AAA players regularly identified that *tournament operation* (specifically tournament logistics/structure) *competition*, and *skill development* as having the most significant impact on their tournament experience. As some of these parents explained, within their respective minor hockey organization the cost of a child playing AAA hockey is the most of any other initiation category; therefore, they expect the highest quality on-ice experiences. Further, some of the AAA parents mentioned that having their child play elite level hockey allows them to see how far their child's hockey development can take them in life, which adds to the importance placed on on-ice tournament experiences. Knowing the tournament preferences of AAA parents, operators of AAA tournaments must use the resources at their disposal—like MYHockey—to ensure that the highest level of *competition*, *skill development* opportunities, and *tournament operation* practices are associated with their brand.

By comparison, parents of children playing either AA, A, AE, or BB hockey had their ideal tournament perceptions equally impacted by on and off-ice experiences.

Specifically, parents of children playing within these lower levels of competition regularly responded with *parity* (fairness), *cost*, and *entertainment options* as having a significant influence on their tournament experiences. As many of these types of parents explained they did not expect their child to seriously pursue hockey in their teenage years; therefore, tournaments are mainly used as opportunities to create memories while being physically active. In order to effectively manage the brand of their respective tournaments, organizers of tournaments for the less elite levels of competition must provide attending teams the opportunity to balance tournament participation with enjoyable off-ice activities. The planning and execution of tournaments at the AAA and lower levels of competition could be aided by reproducing this study with parents of each initiation category. It is rare for a tournament to offer competition in the wide range of initiation categories that is represented by this particular sample. Therefore, further specification for research participants could only enhance the findings for industry practitioners.

In addition to the initiation category that their child is competing in, a parent's perception of a tournament may be influenced by whether or not they are a coach. Within the sample of this investigation, nine respondents identified themselves as either a volunteer head or assistant coach with their child's team. All of the coaches that were interviewed discussed that one of their main responsibilities was to research and ultimately book tournaments for their respective teams to participate in. Most of the coaches that were interviewed discussed that tournaments are booked by consulting their respective parent groups as well as gauging their team's abilities, goals, and expectations. Based on their tournament booking responsibility, coaches act as the ultimate proxy

decision maker for their respective teams. It is the coaches who have the most interaction with tournament brand touch-points—like a website and/or personal communication with organizers—and the positive or negative associations that they establish with the tournament from these interactions can be reflected by a team's entire parent group.

Of specific interest to tournament organizers is the significant influence that *competition, parity, and skill development* have on a coach's perception of a tournament. All of the coaches that were interviewed made it clear that their decisions are mandated by the goal to improve the overall hockey skills of each player on their team. The importance of skill development was regularly highlighted by the respondents who were AAA and AA coaches. Therefore, coaches strategically pick tournaments that will allow them to achieve their goal of enhancing the skills of their players through *competition*.

In addition to *skill development*, coaches are also charged with the task of managing the morale of their players and parent group. Therefore, tournaments seem to be strategically chosen based on the likelihood of success for the team. Further, some coaches stated that they strategically picked tournaments where the likelihood of team success is high, perhaps validating their coaching skills to the collective group of the team. An example of how a coach effectively balances the need to enhance *skill development* with maintaining positive team morale was noted by Julian. Julian, a coach of a AAA team, recognized that his team had yet to develop the high level of skill required to compete in highly regarded AAA tournaments—specifically in Toronto. As a result, Julian made a conscious effort to avoid competition in Toronto for the 2014-2015 season in order for his team to continue at its own pace of *skill development* while still achieving success in the process. Behaviours like Julian's were common with many of

the interviewed coaches. The tournament preferences of coaches supports the work of Ajzen and Madden (1996) that states human-behaviour is goal-directed. Further, people are motivated by items, like attributes, which they expect will allow them to attain a desired outcome or benefit (Chard et al., 2015). Youth sport programs—especially minor hockey—have become increasingly privatized, costly, and performance-orientated (Coakley, 2011); thus, the role of coaches as proxy decision-makers must be thoroughly understood. Due to the significant influence that a coach has on tournament selection and experience (i.e., controlling ice time and organizing team building activities), tournament organizers must be aware that a parent's satisfaction with a tournament can be directly linked to the level of satisfaction associated with the coach's experience.

Of interest, *cost*, *limiting stress*, and *emotive links* were consistently identified by parents who were not coaches, as influencers of a great tournament. Further, a limited number of coaches similarly identified these attributes. And, while many parents shared the coaches' preference for tournament *competition* to be associated with *skill development* and *parity* many also stated that watching their child play new *competition* made the tournament experience more personally enjoyable. The difference in responses can be attributed to the aforementioned responsibilities of a coach requiring these individuals to put team priorities ahead of their parental preferences. As a result, it is no wonder that a coach's ideal tournament experience is more team oriented. The associations of *limiting stress*, *emotive links*, *cost*, and the entertainment value of the on-ice *competition* is quite personal and might be unsurprising given that parents only have to consider their own personal or familial experiences to establish their perception of an ideal tournament. Considering the differences in tournament preferences that have been

identified between coaches and non-coaching parents, future research should reproduce this study using only coaches or non-coaching parents as respondents in order to expand on the presented findings.

The above section has provided a detailed discussion on the unique findings of this investigation. Specifically, the section has discussed how a tournament experience—like the delivery of all services—varies based on the demographic characteristics of the consumers. Also, through this discussion some directions for future research and implications for industry practitioners have been identified. The following section will further discuss the implications of the findings for industry practitioners through the presentation of recommendations.

Recommendations for Industry Practitioners

As much as this study aimed to understand why hockey parents select particular tournament destinations for their child's team to travel to during a season, the findings of this research indicate that it is the management of the tournament that has the most significant influence on parents' preferred tournament destinations. More specifically, the brand of the tournament, which is reflective of the tournament's management, has the greatest influence on attracting potential tournament participants. As Aaker (1991) explains, the brand and what it represents is a significant asset for most businesses because it is the basis for a competitive advantage and future earning streams. As stated in the opening chapter of this manuscript, hosting tournaments are an economic necessity for most minor hockey organizations across Canada (GTHL, 2013; OMHA, 2013b; O'Reilly et al., 2014; O'Reilly et al., 2015). Therefore, tournament organizers must be aware of the impact and be able to manage the significant impact their respective event's

brand. In order to improve the management of a brand, managers must identify all of the points of contact consumers have with the brand and nourish those interactions (Aaker, 1991). The findings of this investigation highlight that an ideal tournament experience, from the perspective of a hockey parent, is ultimately driven by the events that take place at and away from the hosting arena(s). Specifically, there are seven attributes and nine benefits that parents associate with an ideal tournament experience.

Like with most sporting events, no tournament is created equally. Indeed, hosting scenarios will differentiate based on regional characteristics (i.e., location and tourist appeal) as well as participant characteristics (i.e., division and initiation category of teams). Most tournament organizers would prefer to host a tournament in a large metropolis instead of a small rural location because hosting a tournament in a large metropolis would assist with attracting teams to the event. However, tournament organizers must be able to plan and execute successful tournaments regardless of location because of the economic implications these events hold for most minor hockey organizations. It is important to note that within the context of this study, no respondent identified a preferred host community for a tournament to be held in. Therefore, these findings can be applied by tournament organizers to improve their event's brand across all levels of minor hockey.

Once again, in order to effectively manage the brand of a tournament, organizers must identify each of the brand attributes and associated benefits that they can control. As with most sporting events, the brand of a tournament is impacted by its association with attributes that are out of the control of the organizing committee (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Specifically, a parent's view of the host community,

experience with their *accommodation* selection, and local *entertainment options* can directly influence their perception of the tournament's brand. In order to aid in establishing consistently positive off ice experiences, organizers are encouraged to approach local hotel operators who may service participating teams over the course of the tournament and share with them the expectations (i.e., mini sticks and team socializing activities will be accommodated) that hockey parents have of their accommodation provider. Regardless of the negativity that may be associated with the aforementioned attributes, tournament organizers must remain confident that a quality tournament can take place in a host community with a poor to tourist image. Tournament organizers are reminded that no respondent identified a preferred host community for a tournament to be held in. Instead, respondents were predominantly concerned with the hockey experience delivered by the organizers.

In order for tournament organizers to establish the aforementioned positive brand perception, the findings of this study can be looked to for support. Respondents indicated that the most favourable tournaments were those whose leading attributes consisted of quality *competition* and a display of effective *tournament operations*. Due to their significance, the attributes of *competition* and *tournament operations* lead to the greatest variety of attainable benefits for parents. Also, they consist of the most influential tournament brand touch-points including: athletes, coaches, organizers, referees, schedules, websites, and vendors. As respondents indicated, effective management of the aforementioned attributes and touch-points can lead to parental satisfaction with the tournament regardless of which teams win and lose. Further, parental satisfaction is supported by tournament organizers ensuring that the control that they have on the *cost*,

travel requirements (specifically distance between host arenas), and *experiential influencers* is used to benefit the attending parents.

Within the area of tournaments or similar small scale youth sport events the importance of the event's perception is magnified due to many consumers being one-time attendees (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2012). Further, as a study on attendees of a youth soccer tournament revealed, youth sport event spectators form strong behavioural and image perceptions from the first time they attend the event, which do not change with attendance frequency (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2012). Therefore, tournament organizers ultimately have one attempt to satisfy a consumer of a youth sport event. Respondents of the current study did not indicate that satisfaction with a tournament experience would entice them to return to the host location for leisure purposes. Future research should investigate the relationship between youth sport event experiences and intent to return for leisure purposes. Findings could aid destination marketers in understanding how to position the destination's brand to entice event attendees to return.

Additionally, due to the consistent turnover of attendees, tournaments are inherently reliant on WOM from attendees. Specifically, organizers benefit from attendees returning to their home minor hockey organizations and sharing their tournament experiences with the teams representing the age groups below them. It is through this WOM that tournament organizers hope the younger teams are enticed to attend their event the following season. Within the context of the present study, two of the coaches who were interviewed explained that their respective teams would be attending a future tournament based on the referral of another coach within their home minor hockey organization. A tournament's reliance on WOM is consistent with Berry's

(2002) suggestion that the success of service brands is contingent on their ability to establish consistent customer referrals.

Indeed, it is in the best interest of a tournament organizer to focus on maximizing the control that they have on the *tournament operations, competition, cost, travel requirements* (distance between host arenas), and *experiential influencers* to ensure that each of the attributes contributes to a positive tournament experience for attendees. Ideally, implementing a co-branding strategy with the host community and local hotel chain(s) would allow tournament organizers to gain some control of the influence that *accommodations* and *local entertainment* options have on a tournament's brand. However, as was discussed in the Literature Review chapter, minor hockey tournaments (with few exceptions) are not regularly used to strategically enhance a destination's image or promote tourism products (i.e., hotel). Typically, it is major sporting events that are commonly used as a strategy to enhance a destination's image or increase the attention brought to its tourism products (Xing & Chalip, 2006).

Despite the currently limited co-branding opportunities available for tournament organizers, it does not limit the fact that minor hockey events—like tournaments—are entrenched in the Canadian sport tourism landscape and have been identified as significant economic stimulants for communities (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Further, many municipalities and regions are transitioning their economic focus to sport tourism (Gibson & Fairley, 2013). Specifically, “communities view the use of sport events as marketing tools that contribute to the future success of the destination by creating awareness, seeking image improvement, and attracting tourism business development to generate future inbound travel” (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007, p.183). Therefore, as a result of the

significance of hockey in Canada and economic transition, opportunities may soon exist for tournament organizers to pursue implementing a co-branding strategy (and their host of supportive features) with host communities and local businesses. The potential for future co-branding opportunities, further highlights the importance for tournament organizers to maintain a positive brand perception by effectively managing the attributes and benefits that they can directly control. Regardless of the potential co-branding opportunities that may exist in the future for some tournament organizers, their top priority should never differ from nor should they relinquish the control that they have on providing the best hockey experience possible to attendees. Tournament organizers are reminded of the respondents who spoke negatively about tournaments that were partnered with third party organizations (i.e., hotels) and used the partnership to price gouge parents.

At the onset of this study, it was identified that tournament organizers do not consistently evaluate or manage the relationship their specific brands have with rep hockey parents—a significant stakeholder. As the literature on brand management indicates, a business' brand is one of its most valuable assets because what it stands for is directly linked to gaining a competitive advantage and enhancing revenue streams (Aaker, 1991). Brand management indicates that improving a brand begins with identifying all of the touch-points that a consumer interacts with and establishes a relationship with (George, 2003; Hollis, 2008). The relationship that consumers establish with a brand must be nourished by managers in order to maintain or enhance the appeal of the brand (Aaker, 1991). The findings of this study have accurately identified the attributes and accompanying touch-points of a tournament brand that are most important

to hockey parents. Additionally, the findings of this study have also identified the benefits associated with the brand attributes of a tournament that parents use to formulate their perception of an ideal tournament experience. Thus, tournament organizers now have the means to manage the interactions and impressions each attribute leaves with the parents. Furthermore, establishing and maintaining a positively perceived tournament can aid organizers in attracting quality competition to a destination that traditionally lacks tourist appeal. For example, some respondents discussed feeling concerned about attending a tournament in a traditionally non-family friendly market; however, due to the successful efforts of tournament organizers, these individuals left pleased with their experience.

With all research work, the researcher must be aware of the limitations that exist. The following section will discuss the limitations of the current study.

Limitations

Like any other study, limitations exist regarding the finding of the current investigation. Specifically, the findings of this study were produced with a sample of hockey parents with children aged seven to 12 playing boys rep hockey in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region of Ontario. The lack of representation of the parents of children playing on female rep teams and teenage rep sport participants limits the understanding of an ideal tournament experience for these particular groups. Further, the sample and the location in which the sample was recruited from was done out of convenience for the researcher. Even though the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region is one of the most densely populated and diverse regions of Canada the consistency of the findings in regions with differences in population characteristics and structure of the minor hockey system is yet to be determined.

The discussion portion of this chapter highlighted that parents with children playing rep hockey in a specific initiation category are indeed their own unique group. It is rare for a minor tournament to offer a similar range (BB-AAA) of initiation categories to compete in. While the discussion of results attempted to highlight the differences in ideal tournament experiences between the groups—specifically between AAA and the less elite levels of competition—organizers are cautioned in catering to these specific differences because of the variety of initiation categories that were included in the sample. As result, some of the insight from a particular group of parents may have been overshadowed by the trends that were specific to the entire group. Similar to the parents of particular initiation categories, coaches were deemed to be their own unique group. The discussion of results did attempt to highlight the differences in a coach's ideal tournament experience and the impact it has on the team; however, due to the limited number of coaches in the sample, some of their insight may have been overshadowed by that of non-coaching parents.

In addition to the limitation directly related to the study's sample, the methodology that was used also presented some drawbacks. Like any other research method, the laddering interview technique has its drawbacks. Utilizing this method presented the limitations of interview format inconsistencies, a lack of rapport, and a vested personal interest in the topic.

Due to the unique nature of laddering interviews, the researcher conducted three pilot interviews in order to become familiar with the process. Although the pilot interviews were completed, at times, the novice level experience of the research was noticeable, interview quality did improve with each opportunity. This may have resulted

in the researcher's last interview being "better" than the first due to the improvement of the researcher's skills of knowing when to end a ladder or probe for more detail about an identified association. Also, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) acknowledged that having previous interviews to reference can aid the skill development of a novice researcher. Overall, the differences between interviews were subtle, however, Liamputtong (2009) highlighted that even subtle interview differences can be problematic for a novice researcher. The researcher embraced the subtle differences and managing them contributed to his personal development as a researcher within the post-positivist paradigm. It should also be noted that during two interviews the audio recorder stopped and restarted, which caused some valuable data to be deleted. These instances resulted in the researcher resorting to his interview field notes (discussed in the Rigour section) from the respective interviews to assist in filling the void left by the lost data.

A lack of rapport is considered a barrier to successful interviews for novice researchers (Goodwin, Pope, Mort, & Smith, 2003). For this particular study, the researcher—in most cases—was able to establish rapport with respondents based on his own personal experiences with minor hockey tournaments and his reliance on snowball sampling. Snowball sampling allowed the researcher to rely on previous respondents to assist in initiating rapport-building upon his first encounter with a new participants. Due to the limited time commitment that was required of a respondent to complete a laddering interview, establishing a rapport by sharing minor hockey tournament experiences was easy and resulted in respondents producing a variety of detailed ladders within their respective interviews. However, beyond the interview process the lack of rapport or personal familiarity with the researcher may have been the reason for only two

respondents returning completed member checked transcripts. Perhaps if the respondents personally knew the researcher beforehand they would have felt more inclined to complete the member check process. Member checking allows for study participants to authenticate and validate the details of the data that was collected from them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result, of the limited number of member checks that were completed results may have been impacted by the researcher wrongfully interpreting a respondent's ladders.

Like most research, this project was completed by the researcher being driven by his passion for the topic. Due to this passion, the researcher limited biases derived from personal experiences (discussed in the Reflexivity section) in the interview phase of the research process. This was done to prevent the responses of interviewees from being swayed or pre-maturely judged by the researcher's pre-conceived notions and agenda (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Swaying the answers of an interviewee in any form could have been detrimental to that particular interview and the study as a whole (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As was mentioned previously, the researcher's personal biases based on experiences with tournaments was used in the transcription and coding process. Considering the presented limitations and findings of the current study, indeed there exists opportunities for future research. The following section will present potential directions for future research.

Future Research

The findings provide a baseline for assessing the formation and influence that brand associations have on parents considering sport opportunities for their child. Previous research and evaluations of brand associations have only been completed using

fans of collegiate or professional sports as subjects (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross et al., 2006). There currently is limited existing research on brand management or the significance of brands at the youth sport level. Indeed, studies have identified that youth sport participation is regularly a product of specific parental motivations; however, limited research exists that identifies whether youth sport brands truly reflect parental motivations. As was discussed in the Literature Review, anything can be branded and brand management should be a predominant concern for all marketers (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Thus, an interesting future study would be to reproduce the Attribute-Benefit Model using the parents of a different rep sport. The findings could attest to the similarities in the expectations that all parents have for their child's sporting experience. Furthermore, the most important attributes and benefits that influence parents' decisions when making sporting decisions for their child could be identified through an experiment that gauged parents' responses to manipulated marketing messages from youth sporting services.

It was a goal of the researcher to add to the existing literature that explains how consumers formulate their perception of an ideal experience when considering a particular destination to visit. Due to the growth of sport tourism, identifying brand associations as a link to understanding the expectations of tourists is of importance to the industry. Using brand associations as a tool to understand tourists' perception and travel intentions regarding a destination is an advancement on the often used push-pull motivational framework. The push-pull motivational framework fails to offer details on the interconnection between the identified push and pull factors that led to the commitment to travel to a particular destination. By comparison, brand associations

reflect the attributes and benefits of selecting a particular brand (including destination and sporting events; Keller, 1993). Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of sport tourists, it would be interesting to reproduce the Attribute-Benefits Model with regards to sport tourism decisions including: attending a hallmark event (i.e., Super Bowl, FIFA World Cup, Olympic Games), attending nostalgic sporting locations (i.e., hall of fames), and active sporting vacations (i.e., skiing and golf).

Additionally, the current study offers methodological insights on how researchers can successfully build on the findings of this project. Specifically, the successful completion of this work highlights that snowball sampling is an ideal sampling method to implement in order to retain contact with and navigate through the social group dynamic that parents of a youth rep sport team or a group of sport tourists have constructed. Therefore, future researchers looking to reconstruct the Attribute-Benefit Model are encouraged to implement a similar sampling strategy in order to obtain their desired number of respondents. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to implement the laddering interview technique to investigate the formation and influence brand associations have on other rep sport parents and sport tourists' decisions. Due to the simplicity of the laddering technique, future researchers will be able to accommodate the time constraints that sport tourists and parents of children playing rep sports face. As has been discussed in previous sections, the laddering interview technique allows the researcher to accommodate any proxy-decision making that may take place in a sport tourism setting while highlighting the significance of the influence that the relationship between brand attributes and benefits have on one's decision. Together, the snowball sampling method and laddering interview technique will allow future researchers to

successfully reproduce the Attribute-Benefit Model within the context of other rep sports; thus, adding greater contributions to the limited sport management literature on this topic.

In addition to the previously discussed ideas, the following lists further directions for future research:

- I. As explained in the previous section, the findings of this study are limited to boys' rep hockey tournaments. With female hockey participation rapidly increasing across Canada (Campbell & Parcels, 2013), it would be interesting to reproduce the current investigation with female rep hockey parents. The differences between male and female rep hockey parents may be of significance to tournament organizers.
- II. Considering the limitation that was presented regarding the study only including participants with children aged seven to 12 playing rep hockey (tyke-peewee major), it would be interesting to reproduce the Attribute-Benefit Model with parents of bantam and midget aged teenagers. As Campbell and Parcels (2013) note, the focus on skill development heightens once children reach their teenage years in rep hockey. Thus, it could be assumed that tournament organizers of bantam and midget tournaments may have different parental priorities to consider in their strategic event plans.
- III. Indeed, each initiation category consists of its own unique group of parents. As a result, the ideal tournament experience may vary depending on initiation category. As has been discussed in this chapter, the researcher has attempted to highlight the differences between the parents of the various initiation categories that were surveyed (BB-AAA). Since it is rare for a minor hockey tournament to offer

competition with a similar wide range of initiation categories, future research must be done to provide tournament organizers with greater detail of the differences between these parent groups. Specifically, it is suggested that the current study is reproduced with parents from individual initiation categories. Such a study, would allow for the identified differences in *competition, skill development, cost, and entertainment option* expectations to be built upon.

- IV. Coaches have been identified as having a significant impact on the facilitation of positive youth sport experiences (Jõessar, Hein & Hagger, 2012; Ntoumanis, Taylor, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2012). This research identified that a coach regularly provides the final decision when it comes to tournament selection. Due to the limited number of coaches in this study's sample, their insight may have been overshadowed by that of non-coaching parents. As a result, reproducing the current investigation using coaches as the sample would add greater detail to the presented understanding of a coach's perception of an ideal tournament for tournament organizers.
- V. As was mentioned previously in this section, it would be interesting to check the consistency of the findings across the varying regions of Canada. Further, many respondents mentioned travelling to the United States for tournaments and thoroughly enjoying their time in attendance. An interesting future study would be to compare the influences on tournament selection for Canadian and American rep hockey parents. The findings of such research would be of significance to organizers who are in close proximity to the Canada-U.S. border, like in the

Greater Golden Horseshoe Region and are interested in attracting American teams to their events or maintaining the interest of Canadian teams.

- VI. With the rise of popularity that independently operated minor hockey services (i.e., MYHockey) have seen, it would be interesting to investigate how these services influence the perceptions of an ideal tournament. For example, only two respondents explained that due to the consistent success of their respective child's team do they have to actively seek out tournaments above their initiation category or far distances from home to participate in. This behaviour is unique because it was not shared by the parents from a variety of highly rated teams (see Appendix E) that were interviewed. Therefore, reproducing the current study with parents from MYHockey's top ranked teams would provide insight into how highly rated teams view tournament competition and if there are inherent difficulties finding adequate competition associated with being part of a highly skilled team.
- VII. Further considering the rise of independently operated minor hockey organizations, comparing parents' perceptions of spring/summer tournaments to fall/winter tournaments would be insightful. As mentioned in the first chapter, the tournament industry does not suffer a significant decline in offerings during the offseason (April-August). Determining whether tournament expectations for parents remain consistent across all seasons would be beneficial for organizers in order to improve their offerings of tournaments and ultimately their profit margins.
- VIII. Comparing how parents deem a tournament or youth sport experience favourable to that of children would be an interesting future study. Research has been

conducted examining parental motivations for enrolling their children in youth sport (e.g. Chard et al., 2015; Coakley, 2011), as well as, analyzing how the two groups socialize through sport (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2009; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Green & Chalip, 1997; Hasbrook, 1986; Snyder & Purdy, 1982). Children, as participants, are indeed stakeholders in youth sport experiences yet limited research exists analyzing their motivations or evaluations of the sport experience. Indeed, managers of youth sport experiences would find significance in understanding children perceptions of the sport experiences they offer.

- IX. In addition to youth sports, tournaments also exist for adult recreational sports (i.e., slo-pitch, softball, hockey, etc.). Therefore, it would be interesting to reproduce the current study using adult recreational sport participants as the sample. The potential findings would be beneficial to the organizers of adult recreational sport tournaments and the host location to ensure that participants annually return to the event.

Conclusion

Minor hockey, specifically minor hockey tournaments, are indeed a significant economic stimulus for host regions and organizations across Canada. Therefore, due to the importance of these events, the needs of the stakeholders must consistently be met in order to ensure long term success. Parents are indeed the most influential when it comes to tournament destination selection for their child's team. It is important to satisfy the expectations of parents since they are regularly deemed the purchaser of their child's youth sport experiences. This study has identified that the expectations of an ideal tournament experience are reflected in brand associations developed by rep hockey

parents. Specifically, through the laddering interview technique, this study has identified seven attributes and nine interconnected attainable benefits, which together provide insight into a parent's ideal tournament experience.

Inspiration for this study was spawned from the inconsistency in quality that exists in the minor hockey tournament industry. As discussed in existing literature, the success of a service is ultimately linked to the perception of quality its brand bestows. Further, effective brand management is a result of identifying, managing, and evaluating consumers' interactions with the brand. Specifically, this study identified that tournament organizers are directly responsible for the on-ice and at-arena experiences had by tournament attendees. Ensuring that these experiences are positive for all attendees—especially parents—can assist tournament organizers in overcoming their tournament's brand being associated with a hosting location that lacks appeal. Ultimately, this study provides a baseline for assessing the formation and influence of brand associations in youth sport decisions made by parents. The implementation of the findings and proper brand management procedures should result in significant enhancements of tournament brand appeals. Thus, allowing for the aforementioned economic goals associated with minor hockey tournaments to be achieved.

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Appendix A**[DATE]**

Title of Study: Brand Associations of Minor Hockey Tournaments: Understanding the Rep Hockey Parents Perspective

Principal Student Investigator: Daniel Wigfield, Graduate Student, Sport Management, Brock University

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Chris Chard, Associate Professor, Sport Management, Brock University

Dear [NAME],

I, Daniel Wigfield, Graduate Student, from the Department of Sport Management at Brock University, would like to invite you to participate in a research project entitled "Using Parent Motivations to Identify the Ideal Minor Hockey Tournament Experience".

The purpose of this study is to uncover the key characteristics of an ideal tournament experience, from the perspective of hockey parents. It is the goal of the researcher to use this study to form recommendations that will allow tournament organizers to improve their branding strategies and overall events to better reflect the motivations of tournament attending hockey parents. It is also the hope of the researcher that by focusing on Niagara Region hockey parents the findings are used to improve the local offering of tournaments – thus ensuring that each tournament maximizes its value to its host community and minor hockey organization.

In order to complete this study I will need approximately 30-40 rep hockey parents to take part in an approximately 15-45 minute audio recorded interview. Specifically, the parents need to be of boys who play either rep tyke, novice, or atom hockey in the Niagara Region. As a (coach, manager, or hockey school director) who is entrenched in my targeted research sample population, I am requesting that the attached information poster and letter of invitation be forwarded to the parent group or your team. Forwarding the recruitment information and participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Those who are interested or those who have questions please feel free to contact me or my faculty supervisor using the contact information listed below.

I thank you for your time, consideration, and assistance with this study.

Daniel Wigfield

Daniel Wigfield

Graduate Student

dw09el@brocku.ca

Dr. Chris Chard

Faculty Supervisor

Associate Professor

(905)-688-5550 x. 5875

cchcard@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board **13-308**. The Research Ethics Board Office may be contacted by email at reb@brocku.ca or by telephone at (905)-688-5550 extension 3035.

Appendix B

NIAGARA REGION HOCKEY PARENTS WANTED!!!

You are invited to take part in a Brock University
Department of Sport Management Masters Thesis:
Brand Associations of Minor Hockey Tournaments:
Understanding the Rep Hockey Parents' Perspective

PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS:

- **MUST** have a child currently playing either **TYKE**, **NOVICE**, **ATOM**, or **PEEWEE** boys rep hockey within the Niagara Region
- The child's team **MUST** be planning to attend a **TOURNAMENT** within the 2014-2015 season
- **SHOULD** be willing to take part in an **AUDIO RECORDED INTERVIEW** (in person, Skype, or phone) for 15-45 minutes

IF INTERESTED PLEASE CONTACT DAN VIA EMAIL: dw09el@brocku.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Chris Chard - cchard@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board **13-308**

Research Ethics Office 905-688-5550 x 3035 OR reb@brocku.ca

Appendix C

Title of Study: The Brand Associations of Minor Hockey Tournaments: Understanding Parent Motivations Using Means-End Theory

This study is being conducted by:

Daniel Wigfield, Graduate Student, Department of Sport Management, Brock University

This study is being supervised by:

Dr. Chris Chard, Department of Sport Management, Brock University

You are invited to be in a research study examining the brand associations of minor hockey tournaments. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. If possible, upon completing the informed consent form I ask that you return it to the researcher, Daniel Wigfield, via email (listed below) or in person prior to your interview.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine the associations that a tournament's brand must develop in order for hockey parents to seriously consider selecting it as a tournament destination for their child's team. Research suggests that parents are the primary source of the economic support associated with these events. Due to the potential of both direct economic benefit and indirect community benefits associated with minor hockey tournaments it is essential that their respective brands are managed effectively. The following research questions will guide the study:

- I. When thinking of a preferred tournament to attend, what are important attributes of the tournament that influence hockey parents to consider it more favourable than other tournament offerings?
- II. When thinking of a preferred tournament to attend, what are personal benefits of attending the tournament that influence hockey parents to consider it more favourable than other tournament offerings?
- III. How do the attributes and benefits relate to one another?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following: to participate in an audio-recorded personal face to face, telephone, or Skype interview with me that will last approximately 15-45 minutes in length. Questions will entail asking you to reflect on or describe your ideal minor hockey tournament experience as a parent. Questions will also entail you to describe why the particular items that are identified as part of the ideal tournament experience are important to you as a parent. The audio-recorded interview will be transcribed verbatim and you will have the opportunity to review/verify the transcript. Your interview transcript will be emailed to you and you will be asked to review it and return it via email with any changes you would like to make to the transcript

(e.g., additions, deletions, and/or clarifications). The researcher requests that participants return their member-checked transcripts within seven to ten days of receiving the original transcript via email.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. As a participant in this study, you will receive no compensation for your participation. However, the information you provide to the study will assist youth sport event organizers improve their practices and sport marketing scholars.

Confidentiality:

Data collected during this study will be stored on the researcher's computer, which requires a password for access. The data from the interviews will be transcribed verbatim and the audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home. Data will be kept for four years after which time the data will be shredded. Access to these data will be restricted to the researcher (Daniel Wigfield). Participant names and minor hockey organization affiliations will be replaced with assigned pseudonyms for publication purposes and never disclosed in written or oral presentations of the study.

The researcher will keep and securely store each respondents email for the duration of the study. The emails of each participant will be needed in order for the researcher to send each participant a copy of the verbatim transcript of their interview to review for accuracy. Also, each participant will be given the option to receive a virtual executive summary of the study upon its completion. The emails will be deleted upon the executive summary being sent out to each of the interested respondents. Those respondents who do not wish to receive an executive summary will have their emails deleted upon them returning their member-checked interview transcripts to the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your current minor hockey organization. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. If you withdraw from the study, all data provided will be confidentially destroyed and not used in the analysis.

Contacts and Questions:

I am the researcher conducting this study and my contact information is listed below. You may ask me any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me: Daniel Wigfield, Department of Sport Management, Brock University – dw09el@brocku.ca or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Chris Chard, Department of Sport Management, Brock University - cchard@brocku.ca, (905)-688-5550 x 5875 - 500 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1, CANADA.

Additionally, this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University, file number 13-308. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Research Ethics Board of Brock University. The Research Ethics Board Officer may be contacted by email at reb@brocku.ca or by telephone at 905-688-5550 extension 3035.

Consent Form

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in this Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I want about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time. By replying to this e-mail or by signing this letter I acknowledge that I am participating in this study and that I am providing informed consent.

You will be given a copy of this letter to keep for your records.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

[Date]

Dear [Respondent's Name],

I would like to thank you for the time and expertise you shared with Kyle, my research assistant, regarding the brand associations of minor hockey tournaments. Your participation and insights in my research has been essential to the understanding of brand associations from the perspective of youth sport parents; specifically minor hockey parents.

In the near future, I plan on sending you a copy of your interview transcript for your review. As well, if you have indicated that you would like an executive summary of the study, I will be sending that to you upon the study's completion. I hope that the study's findings will be helpful for tournament organizers and other key minor hockey officials within your community. If you have any questions about the research please feel free to contact me.

Again, thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Daniel Wigfield

Daniel Wigfield

Graduate Student

Brock University

905-327-2505

dw09el@brocku.ca

Appendix E

Research Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Coach (Assistant Coach*)	Initiation Category	Team Rank (Percentile)
Alex	Male	Yes	BB	NA
Kevin	Male	Yes	AAA	78
Marty	Male	Yes	AAA	87
Sam	Male	No	A	93
Debra	Female	No	A	34
Adriano	Male	Yes	AA	62
Ryan	Male	Yes*	AA	62
Keaton	Male	Yes*	BB	NA
Joshua	Male	Yes	AE	NA
Andrew	Male	No	A	34
Julian	Male	Yes	AAA	38
Meaghan	Female	No	AE	NA
Mary-Jo	Female	No	AE	NA
Mikayla	Female	No	AE	NA
Derek	Male	No	AE	NA
Nicole	Female	No	AE	NA
Jordan	Male	No	AAA	70
Larry	Male	No	AAA	70
Greg	Male	No	AAA	38
Michelle	Female	No	AA	79
Quinn	Male	No	AA	79
Kyle	Male	No	AAA	42
Kari	Female	No	A	98
Bryan	Male	Yes	AA	9
Katelyn	Female	No	A	98
George	Male	No	A	25
Hilary	Female	No	AAA	14
Grant	Male	No	AA	98
Tyler	Male	No	AA	98
Harvey	Male	No	AAA	88